

# NMA 7



**\$6**





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## new music articles

# Editorial

This seventh issue of NMA magazine presents something of an 'oral history' of new and experimental music in Australia. For the most part articles have been submitted by people who were actively involved in the developments they discuss.

The period covered is not extensive, ranging from around 1947 to the present, nor could the issue lay claim to any comprehensive account of the period; yet a number of common threads can be seen.

A picture emerges of disparate groups of people working with advanced and socially relevant musical ideas - yet totally under-resourced, lacking any established forum for their work, struggling (still...) for the acceptance of ideas which have long been acknowledged elsewhere - and a musical establishment content to *forget* or ignore the contributions that have been made.

Why should this be so? Perhaps the answer lies as Keith Humble suggests, in the 'betrayal' of the arts since 1972. Perhaps it lies in the 'system of middle class values' propagated by Nineteenth Century English cultural values, as Greg Schiemer proposes. Or perhaps it lies in the ridicule and accusations brought down on new music by the Press, as Geoffrey Barnard observes.

Whatever the case a distinction should be drawn between public and institutional support of this music: the work represented in this issue could claim an audience as large as any opera company or orchestral institution, and yet there has been a noticeable lack of institutional support for it. For this reason the reader should forgive the writers their occasional caustic remarks, for it becomes clear that in many important respects little has changed in this country over the last 50 years. We might well ask where the arts are going, and what relevance current arts policy has to indigenous work.

Collaboration emerges as a key point in virtually every article contained in this issue, and there is a strong community aspect to many of the ideas presented here. The practical development of this work could, for example, form the basis of a community music practice in Australia - if it were recognised as such.

This issue may be seen as a small contribution to the historical debate, such as it is. The approach has been to document some of the initiatives that have taken place, and hopefully put a wider perspective to our understanding of Australian musical culture.

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# Collaborating with Percy Grainger

*Burnett Cross*

I have the pleasure first of all of thanking the Dean<sup>1</sup>, and the Grainger Committee, and all the people who are associated with it, for bringing me back again to where I have so many friends, and where it is such a pleasure to work once again for Percy.

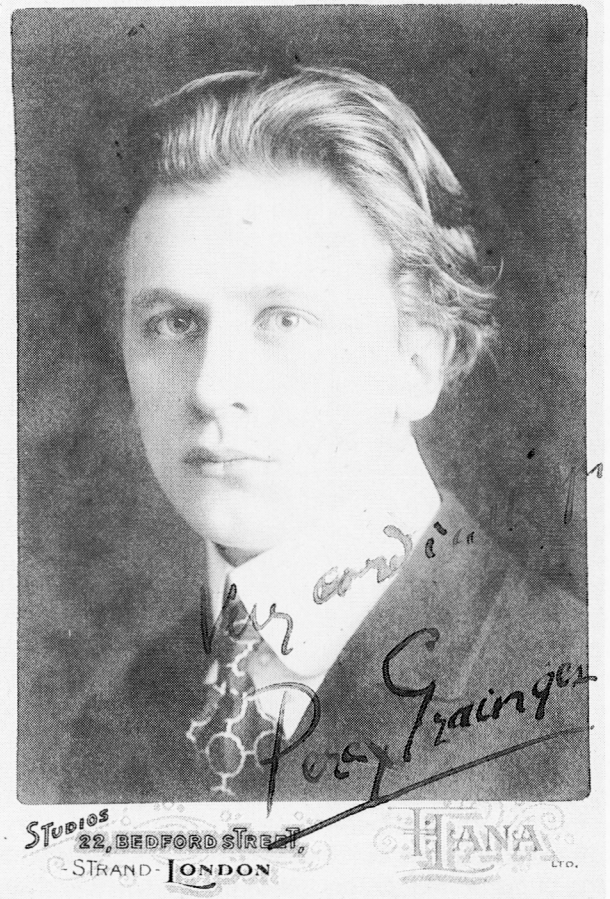
My job this time is to go through Percy's day books and make up a chronology of our Free Music experiments. And so I've been planted in the Grainger Museum looking through his little books. Percy kept a pretty precise record of what we did. The day books run from 1944, when I found my name tucked into a corner in the back, to 1960. I am now up to 1951 and things are getting rather dense and hectic, but I am having the details of our work filled in, details which I had completely forgotten. What surprises me is a closeup view of Percy's professional life which I did *not* have when I was working with him. On tour, travelling, trains, buses... He wrote letters in the train, he wrote letters in the station, he composed at every possible moment, wherever he was sitting down. And he practiced and practiced and practiced. Most amazing.

I came into contact with him in 1944. I have discovered in the daybooks that from about 1945 to about 1949 we weren't really beginning to work together, I was more of an adviser. I was trying to find people who could help him realise his idea of Free Music - music free from the limitations of ordinary performance, and performers.

So I introduced him to various people, among them for instance a man in the Physics Department of Columbia University, a Mr. Stone. Percy had many discussions with him about the possibility of constructing a machine that would play his Free Music. In the end they came to nothing because, Percy told me, he could see that what Mr. Stone - a kind of consulting engineer and inventor - had in mind was something that would require two or three technicians to make the machine go, and to translate Percy's music into something that the machine could handle. That was not what Percy wanted. Percy wanted a machine on which *he* could play, so to speak, on which *he* could perform his Free Music. So for the first four years or so that was my relationship with Percy, that and doing various odd jobs for him. It wasn't until 1949 & 50 that we really started to work together.

I ought to tell you something about the odd jobs... I was invited around to Percy and Ella's place in White Plains one evening, and it turned out to be a kind of party. There were two or three dozen people there, they were talking and chatting, and this was a rather strange thing because Percy was not the party-giving kind. But about halfway through this occasion everything was made clear.

Percy arrived with an armful of steel marimba bars and mallets, and started passing them out. He must have had ten or a dozen single bars of different pitches distributed among the group. Then he said: "Now, somebody here will say 'one - two - three, hit!' and you will all strike the marimba bars with your mallets. But first let me go up the stairs into the top of the house." There he could get a proper sonic perspective. Someone said 'one - two - three, hit!' and we all



struck our marimba bars - and a most tremendous chord swelled out! Filled the house, surged out of the house - filled White Plains for all I know. Percy came leaping down the stairs, two or three at a time, and said: "Now, you take this bar, you take this one, play a little more softly over here, you play louder"... He rearranged the whole thing. Up he went again, one - two - three- bang, another giant chord! So that explained that pseudo-social occasion.

One more odd job that I did for Percy involved a folksong that he had collected in England, **Bold William Taylor**. Percy had made a setting of it for strings

& reeds, harmonium, and tenor voice. He pulled out his manuscript one day and played it through on the piano for me. "I've never heard it," he said. And I said, what do you mean? He said, "I've never heard it performed in my setting. Why don't you learn to sing it?" Now, that included not only a multitude of irregular rhythms and variations in the tune from one verse to the other, it included the Lincolnshire dialect for which Percy had provided a glossary.

I had sung in my mother's choir as a baritone of sorts, the kind of voice that can be listened to with a good baritone on either side of me. (My mother was the choir director and organist, and so I was drafted.) It struck me as a rather absurd idea that I should learn to sing anything, especially for Percy Grainger. But Percy was the kind of a man who, when he suggested something, you felt you ought to have a try at it.

So I learned **Bold William Taylor**, irregular rhythms, variations, Lincolnshire dialect and all. (People sometimes say, can we hear you sing it? My answer is: the world is not yet prepared for that.) We did this slower than the tempo called for so that when I copied the record I could speed it up, and raise the pitch to the tenor range. Thus Percy did not have to transpose the string and reed parts, and I became a tenor. Percy went off with the recording on one of his tours. In Knoxville, Tennessee he appeared with the symphony orchestra there, and ran through **Bold William** after a concert with a group of strings & reeds, and the record playing on a phonograph. He came back just glowing - I've never forgotten - and said: "It sounded just as I thought it should". That was something he always did; he never released anything until he'd heard it and approved the way it sounded.

There was a postlude. The recording - an acetate disk - disappeared into Percy's archives and I thought no more about it. Only Percy and Ella and I, and some orchestral people in Knoxville knew about it. Years later, after Percy's death in 1961 in fact, I went to the Aldeborough Festival concert given by Benjamin Britten for Percy Grainger. I was introduced to Peter Pears, the renowned tenor. He said "Burnett Cross? Burnett Cross? The man who sang **Bold William Taylor**! Marvelous. Marvelous!" And so I became an internationally known tenor.

That was one kind of thing that Percy got me into. Let me get on with something that I need to say. The people I found to help Percy really couldn't help him, for one reason or another. Finally one day Percy said to me, it must have been in desperation, can't we try some experiments ourselves? That was the beginning of our work together, to see if we could realise some part of Percy's quest for his Free Music.

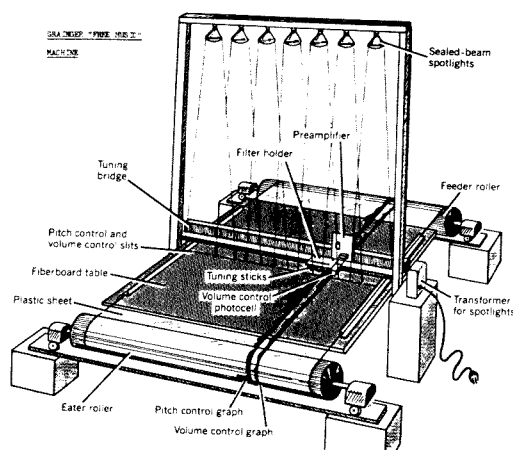
I must say right away that Ella Grainger was a full partner in this effort - not only in the matter of supplying us with dinner, tea, cake etc., but in helping with what we were trying to do - with creative ideas and with labour. So we embarked on the experiments that produced among other things the Free Music machines you can see in the Grainger Museum, as well as the very last machine (which I am still proud of) that never got here.

With our labour from about 1950 to 1960/61 Percy did in fact hear some elements of his Free Music and did confirm his feeling that he was on the right track and that Free Music was something of great impor-

tance. I am today even more impressed with Percy's achievement. I look at it from the point of view of one whose field is science and science education. I think that was why Percy's proposal that we work together on Free Music attracted me in the first place - I could see this as a research problem worth doing.

I look at it this way: Percy Grainger had a glimpse of unknown territory, an unexplored land, in music. That glimpse began, as you know, when Percy was a youngster of 11 or 12 and watched the waves lapping against the side of a boat on Albert Park Lake. He watched the waves and thought, why can't music have the same kind of continuous motion? That seems a rather natural and easy idea, and yet; how many people could have that thought?

Percy saw something that had to be explored. All his life he attempted to find a way to explore this unknown territory. The trouble was of course that to explore it, he needed a vehicle, a machine, and the machine wasn't to be had. What impresses me now is that throughout his life Percy persisted in this quest, this search, this vision, as his day books show.



*The last of the Free Music machines - it never arrived at the museum.*

He persisted in looking for a way to enter the unknown territory. I am beginning to appreciate now what courage that took, what persistence, what expenditure in precious time and energy and money, and even reputation. For people to whom Percy tried to communicate about Free Music didn't really understand it. They went away, quite a few of them, thinking that there was something the matter with Percy Grainger. But Percy persisted. He represented himself sometimes as a rather timid man, easily scared. By heaven, when it came to Free Music, he was a brave man. That's what impresses me now. It seems to me that the time must come, as Percy thought it must, when this new land that Percy had got into a little way will be fully and energetically explored. Because Percy believed this is the way music is heading. When that time comes, I think Percy Grainger's achievement as a pioneer will be fully recognised and saluted.

1. This article is the transcript of a talk given by Burnett Cross at Melbourne University on November 2, 1988.



# Subliminal co-ordinates ...drawing threads

*Helen Gifford*

By the time I turned 12 in 1947, I was galvanized by certain types of music but listened fairly randomly to anything on the radio - (The Wireless). A great favourite with my brother and me was Spike Jones and his City Slickers, a group whose spoofed-up sound events, done with a mix of voices, instruments and effects, belonged to a tradition that began in Germany with late 19th-century burlesque orchestras, (had we but known). One of the best liked pieces devised by these orchestras was **Bahnfahrt**, or The Railway Journey. English comedian Reginald Gardiner had his own version of this, often broadcast when I was a child. This type of musical mimicry, probably brought to England and America by migrating Jewish musicians in the 1930s (unless it's evidence of a Markov chain of events), was found to provide an ideal base for cartoon music at a time when animated film was coming into its own. The inspired lunacy of the English Goon Show owes something to this tradition. The Goons didn't appear until the early 50s - I first heard them in 1952, but their inane foolery was a bit far-fetched for the audience then, who also sensed the deep-seated nihilism underlying their manic action and it was years before they became really popular.

Up until 1956 when the LP arrived, everything on record and therefore much on the radio came in 3 - 4 minute bites which was a bane if you wanted to buy recorded works of any length. I still own a few weighty boxes of early 20th-century masterpieces divided up in this way. They include **The Rite of Spring**, **The Planets**, **Alexander Nevsky**, and several piano concertos especially the good old No.2 (1901) of Rakhmaninov, a work hard to escape from in the 40s and 50s and which had substantial appearances in more than a dozen films made around that time - French, English and American, though not I think, Russian. It now seems that people everywhere were intrigued by the tonal ambiguity of those opening chords which surely must constitute the first example of pop atonal music. In fact Rakhmaninov's music has represented some kind of ideal for the general public throughout the 20th-century, ever since that early **Prelude** of his travelled the world - (the C sharp Minor, Op. 3, 1892, for those of recent birth) - termed *it* by critic Ernest Newman. The magnificent 3rd Piano Concerto, although written in 1909 wasn't generally heard out here until it appeared on LP, but Rakhmaninov deserves his world-wide acclaim.

All my 78s were bought from John Clements record shop where one day I found 2 records with excerpts from Alban Berg's **Wozzeck**. This music from post-World War 1 Vienna sounded fairly amazing in late 1940s Melbourne. It was my introduction to

atonal music and I remember thinking how original and evocative were the sounds of chromatically rising seconds, *pianissimo*, when Wozzeck drowned in the pond beside the body of Marie. Then at a Society of New Music evening I heard the pre-echo of these sounds when listening to a recording of Schoenberg's **Erwartung**, written in 1909. The final bars of this expressionist monodrama has the single



*Kevin McBeath, founder of the Society of New Music, in Thomas' Record Shop c.1958. (Photo: Eric Burt)*

character, a woman, leave the body of her lover and disappear into the night...to the sounds, *pianissimo*, of chromatically rising seconds, if within a slightly different harmonic context. Strange to remember that up until the 50s Schoenberg was known only by name while Webern had never been heard of. So **Wozzeck** was my first contact with expressionist music, but now I realise that this was not my first experience of expressionist art which I got from Walt Disney's films, starting with *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937).

## the society of new music

6th Year - No. 1

March, 1954.

The Society has pleasure in advising you of its first evening for the 1954 series which will be held on **SUNDAY, 14th MARCH**, at the new **COFFIN HALL**, 313 Punt Road, Prahran, at 8 p.m. sharp.

At the beginning of another year's work, we look forward to welcoming new members and renewing acquaintance with old ones. A large number of intending subscribers who were not able to join the Society in the past because of limited accommodation will now be catered for owing to newer, larger and more suitable premises which we have been able to secure for the year. We confidently hope for your help in increasing our membership.

The music we have chosen for our first meeting includes a recent first recording of a major work which, to our knowledge, has never been heard here. This is part of the new material which we are receiving from various connections overseas.

We will also have much pleasure in welcoming back to the Society the distinguished composer and critic, Dorian Le Gallienne, one of our foundation committee-members. Mr. Le Gallienne has recently returned to Melbourne after two and a half years abroad, as winner of the Commonwealth Jubilee Music Scholarship. He will talk about his work and impressions overseas, and we will have the opportunity of hearing a composition of his which was twice performed on the B.B.C.

DORIAN LE GALLIENNE	OVERTURE IN E FLAT (1952)
IGOR STRAVINSKY (1882)	"OEDIPUS REX" (1927) (Opera-Oratorio in Two Acts after Sophocles) (Text by Jean Cocteau)

The idea of composing a large-scale work on a Latin text came to Stravinsky in 1925. After deciding upon OEDIPUS REX as the subject, he asked Jean Cocteau - whose skilful compression of "Antigone" (1922) had earned Stravinsky's praise and probably suggested to him a similar treatment of the "Oedipus" play - to collaborate with him. Cocteau set to work at once, 'telescoping' Sophocles' tragedy into six episodes. Cocteau's text was then given to the Latinist Jean Danielou for translation into church Latin. Latin was purposely chosen by Stravinsky since absolute stylization was in question.

Cocteau reserved a role for himself: that of the speaker who describes the action of each episode in advance. Since it was Stravinsky's wish to incorporate the author's voice and to make of this first recording an authentic historical document, we are enclosing a translation and synopsis of Cocteau's speeches and the plot and form of "Oedipus Rex."

The performance is by the Cologne Radio Symphony Orchestra and Chorus under the direction of Igor Stravinsky - narration by Jean Cocteau. The cast is as follows:

Oedipus - Peter Pears, Tenor. Jocaste - Martha Mdl, Mezzo-Soprano, Creon and Messenger - Heinz Rehfuß, Baritone. Tiresias - Otto von Rohr, Bass. Shepherd - Helmut Krebs, Tenor.

\* \* \* \* \*

May we remind you to have your membership card handy at the door. The Secretary will be available in the foyer to receive new subscriptions and renew old ones.

the society of new music, 6 hammerdale avenue, east st. kilda. 'phone LB 1719

### A Society of New Music news letter, March 1954.

Years later when I saw the German film **The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari**. (made in 1919 when Berg was composing **Wozzeck**), I recognised the same nightmare world of sadism, elongated figures, distortions and altered perspectives, and more signs of German culture being transplanted to the New World. (Plagiarism, or stochastic theory at work again?)

In 1949 I learnt from an older girl at school (renowned for her precocity), that the society of New Music had been formed by Kevin McBeath. It ran for 7 years stopping when long-playing records became generally available in 1955, and Kevin opened Thomas' record shop in partnership with Cliff Hocking. Beginning with monthly Sunday night concerts in a private home, the Society was soon forced to move to larger premises, transferring to the Arrow Theatre in Middle Park but there was still a waiting list for membership. Incredible to think now, of this demand to hear what was then new or still unknown music. The 50 year gap in our knowledge of what had happened in music this century was gradually filled as music presented by the Society was almost never played in local concerts - and I'm referring to music by Stravinsky, Ravel, Prokofiev, Shostakovich and Britten. The only broadcasts of new music were in Kevin's programmes of that name that began in the mid-40s on 3XY with composer Doug Gamley, and continued through the 50s over the ABC's 3LO when

he was joined by Alex Berry. The much wider radio audience made contact with young Australian composers - George Dreyfus was a listener and Peter Sculthorpe wrote in from Tasmania.

The Society of New Music was at that time the only organisation in Australia to have been solely concerned with presenting 20th-century music until the mid-50s when Sydney became a member of the International Society for Contemporary Music -(Melbourne wasn't to join until 1965). Between the years 1949 and 1955 the Society introduced several hundred works by composers of this century, including local composers. Looking through old programmes I note the names of composers whose music I first heard at these evenings: Banks, Bartok, Blomdahl, Cage, Chavez, Cowell, Dallapiccola, Hughes, Le Gallienne, Glanville-Hicks, Liebermann, Lutyens, Martin, Messiaen, Partch, Schaeffer, Schoenberg, Searle, Seiber, Sutherland, Varese and Webern. When Don Banks played his **Sonatine** for piano in 1949, it was the first public performance given any of his music before he left for Europe.

It took more than an hour for me to travel by tram and train to the Arrow Theatre, and to the schoolgirl disguised in civilian dress those Sunday night evenings of new music appeared to be very stylish gatherings. Their favourite composers were Stravinsky, Milhaud, Poulenc, Satie and Hindemith; understandable in those post war years, or is it still the same today? Are Stravinsky and co., though no longer contemporary, more popular than today's composers with audiences in our new music groups? Has the specialised audience for new music developed in the last 40 years?



Melbourne University Harmony and Counterpoint Part IV class, 1956. John Ingram rear right, Helen Gifford rear centre. (Photo: John Ingram)



The uniqueness of the repertoire was only one reason for the success of the Society of New Music. Perhaps more responsible for this was the high standards maintained with live performances, the imaginative presentation and the thorough organisation; in short its complete professionalism down to detailed notes on each piece. The music was new in the sense of recently written, or work of this century still unknown to us, and so new to this audience, such as Kurt Weill's **Die Dreigroschenoper** (The Threepenny Opera), to Brecht's text, a recording of the original 1928 cast - one that Hitler failed to destroy. Works were presented in a blend of live recitals and records, sometimes extending to semi-staged performances and the occasional small scale production, or recorded interview like the conversation between Ernst Krenek and young American composers, or of Kevin interviewing Gertrud Schoenberg. A highlight was when Robert Pikler performed Bartok's unfinished **Viola Concerto** of 1945, with Margaret Schofield playing the piano reduction.

Those in the know would tell me what a cultural desert was Australia, but while annoyed at not being able to get scores of music that I was now starting to hear, I had no sense of lack - Australia being the only desert known to me. Had I been a good pianist with some chance of earning a living from performing, I would have gone overseas for an extended stay to get continuous work and establish a reputation, as did Don Banks and Keith Humble in 1950 - and Percy Grainger half a century before them.

For Australian composers, the one among them to have become a world figure was Percy Grainger, who should be a compulsory study in every school, for as Keith Humble rightly said: "Grainger is the beginning of Australian Music". His music is the logical starting point for young composers looking for a benchmark of Australian-ness. When Grainger died in 1961 we knew him only as an arranger of English folk music, and there was no recognition of him as a composer, so we assumed that his international reputation was based on his immense prowess as a pianist. Nothing was heard in his native Melbourne about the vast output of scores which he continually reworked and rescored, or of his invention of a Free Music machine that produced music liberated from the conventions of harmony, metre, form and instrumentation.

A regular visitor to my home when I was a child was Percy's cousin Norman Aldridge, a friend of my father's from World War I, and when Percy and Ella returned to Melbourne on visits they usually stayed for a time with Norman in Hawthorn. It occurred to Norman that the intense young piano player and student of music might wish to meet Percy, but such was the perversity of young Helen that she placed little value on what was so readily attainable and now greatly regrets this missed opportunity. Especially in 1955 when the Graingers returned to Melbourne for nine months, working all day at the Grainger Museum at a time when I was a student at the adjacent Conservatorium. Inevitably one day, in the Con. foyer, I heard someone talking quietly, maybe an Englishman. Then I looked and recognised Percy - famous in Europe and America as one of the first of this century's super-stars and renowned for his performances on piano rolls, mechanical and electrical

recordings; one of the first composers to explore the possibilities of percussion sound and investigate Asian music, making a direct transcription of Javanese gamelan music in 1933, and retranscribing back into their oriental beginnings for his 'tuneful percussion' Debussy's **Pagodes** and Ravel's **La Vallée des cloches**; the engaging eccentric who made his own toweling clothes and slept on piano lids; the unassuming fellow in the foyer, the 'rather rum chap' as Norman fondly referred to him. Of course I didn't make myself known, but Barry Humphries was more enterprising. He tells how when being driven by his parents somewhere in Kew he suddenly called out 'stop the car! That's Percy



*Dorian Le Gallienne in 1951, aged 36. (Photo: Athol Shmith)*

Grainger', and after introducing himself made an appointment to meet Percy in the Grainger Museum to listen to a Decca 78 owned by Barry of a Grainger work, a version for solo viola of **Arrival Platform Humlet**, that Percy had not yet heard.

The first composer that I came to know was Dorian Le Gallienne. When I was halfway through B. Mus at the Melbourne Conservatorium in 1955 he joined the staff (re-joined, as I believe that in the 40s there he had been composition teacher to Don Banks and James Penberthy). Automatically, Dorian became my teacher for one year of Harmony (so termed). I could have changed to a course of study centred around composition but felt that this was one area of music where I preferred to be my own teacher. When first enrolling at the Con. in 1953 I didn't much mind when told that there was no provision for training composers other than existing subjects in theory, as



my plan was to make piano my chief study, thinking that a composer should be proficient in at least one instrument. I took all music theory to its fullest extent, which meant not doing the School Music course as it lopped off the last stages in all theory subjects, so teaching music in schools seemed not to be an option for me, and that was alright. Aware that my piano technique had distinct limits I chose to study with Roy Shepherd, convinced that he would give me the best chance. It was no surprise when he suggested that I defer a Commonwealth Scholarship for the four year degree course until 1954, and do a year's diploma while he reworked my piano technique. As the other reason, (the higher purpose), for making a major study of piano was the access this would give me to the enormous piano repertoire, including piano versions of large orchestral works and operas, this extra year was a bonus, kindly paid for by my parents.

I had the feeling that there was a bit more bite to Roy's lesson than was the case with other teachers, but I *really worked* at the piano for these five years. All other subjects, theory, history, orchestration, analysis, ensemble, viola(!) passed as a kind of blurred background to the real drama that bisected each week - the piano lesson, and one can see why so many conservatoriums become essentially instrumental schools, the practical and more physical side of music overwhelming all other aspects with addictive incitements like concert practice and concerto competitions to ginger up performances.

Roy Shepherd could have had some claim to inducing a clandestine school of composition among some of his pupils, one with a marked bias towards French music - (the more reason for my learning from Roy as I was already a devotee of French musical style, auditioning to become his student by playing Poulenc's **Mouvements perpétuels**). Among his piano students were Keith Humble and Lawrie Whiffin (both of whom later studied composition in Paris with René Leibowitz), Graham Hair, Haydn Reeder and Kay Dreyfus - thus to George through osmosis, (his French period). Another trail of composers can be traced ahead of me among those who studied counterpoint with A.E.H. Nickson (of the cryptic remark and butterfly collar); Don Banks, Colin Brumby, Clive Douglas, George Dreyfus, Robert Hughes, Keith Humble, James Penberthy, Peter Sculthorpe and Lawrie Whiffin, though we'd hardly constitute a school. From Mr. Nickson I learnt a strict order of counterpoint progressing through all the species, as well as Vocal Polyphony and Fugue, while apart from my year with Dorian, Harmony and a freer form of counterpoint was taught most assiduously by John Ingram - chord progressions being capable of infinite resolution.

Dorian Le Gallienne was a much admired figure in Melbourne's musical world where his wit was often quoted, though there was nothing superficial or dandified about him. He was an influential figure without seeking to be and could easily have brought his opinions to bear more forcibly on his students but preferred to let them make their own discoveries. At Society of New Music evenings he was pointed out to me as the Age music critic - (after his death in 1963 he was succeeded by Felix Werder) - though these were private meetings and not reviewed. An easily

identified member of the audience, Dorian was a tall man with a voice that carried and it was clear that he didn't like some of the most recent serially organised music that had been played. I in turn was getting fed up with the more bland pastiches of Stravinsky's neo classical period, and many of us were convinced that Stravinsky was written-out, or was writing down for mass consumption. Yet the **Symphony of Psalms** of 1930 was amongst my most treasured set of 78s. Nonetheless, I then dismissed him as a back number and looked to atonally based music from Vienna for leads to the future. (So did Stravinsky).

It didn't show for a while. My **Fantasy** for flute and



*Taking up a stance: Helen Gifford in 1947.*

piano of 1958 was my second work but the last to sound as if it had been written in France at the turn of the century. I heard that George Dreyfus had scores and journals of new music so in 1958 decided it was time to meet him and offered to share with a student the job of making a piano reduction of a scene from his opera **Casanova**. I turned up on his doorstep one night when he was painting a room and babysitting his two children. Not long after he took me to see Felix Werder, and as it happened, Peter Sculthorpe who was visiting at the time. But the need of all young artists to talk about their work and to take up a stance was at last being met.

Just as we finally discovered all about the Darmstadt avant garde of the 50's - total serialism, Boulez and Stockhausen, this seemed to collapse, and a new avant garde suddenly appeared in Warsaw.

# AZ Music

Ernie Gallagher

AZ Music may be said to have begun on the 5th of February 1970 when, after returning from overseas, the Sydney composer David Ahern began his class in experimental music (then dubbed the *Laboratory of the Creative Ear*) at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music.

Overseas, Ahern had studied with Karlheinz Stockhausen at the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik in Cologne, and at Darmstadt. He had also travelled to London where he met Cornelius Cardew, and eventually performed with The Scratch Orchestra in some of its very early concerts. (Cardew founded The Scratch Orchestra in Britain in 1969, one year prior to the formation of AZ in Australia).

AZ Music closely followed this overseas activity, and probably represented the greatest single influx of new music to Australia to that date - at least on a corporate level.

The philosophies of Cage and Cardew were ever present in our activities and strongly motivated us. Cage's influence, with the publication in the sixties of *Silence* and later *A Year From Monday*, was very strong. And yet at the same time the group was very 'Cardewian' in its format.

Many of the procedures that Cardew adopted for the Scratch Orchestra in its exploration of sound and of listening experiences, were also adopted by ourselves. His Draft Constitution provided a strong basis for our own private performances and improvisations. Other activities included the performance of Popular Classics from memory (to whatever extent they can be remembered that is), as occurred with Handel's *Halleluja Chorus* (or its remnants) in 1970 at our Christmas activity.

*Improvisation Rites* after the style of The Scratch Orchestra's 'Nature Study Notes' were written by participants and provided springboards for musical improvisation (either imaginative or real). *Compositions* by ourselves and overseas composers were frequently performed; and *Research Projects*, often in the nature of sound architecture or visual sound 'maps', were employed. This research of the sound world was experiential - employing direct contact, imagination and identification. All academicism and the accumulation of data were shunned. By these means we came into direct contact with natural sound and realised that we really only sculpt our sound environment, or more accurately, our listening experiences, rather than actually create sound.

It has been said that, where Cage liberated sound, Cardew liberated people. The performer/composers in AZ were drawn from wide backgrounds - from jazz to classical music, from philosophy to psychology, to art and journalism, and the unemployed. This did not detract in any way from the musical cohesion of the group, as each member (and many were completely untrained musicians lacking the pretensions of professionalism) brought to it his or her own

specialities, rather like in The Scratch Orchestra. AZ was its members.

The music performed by AZ - notably the paragraphs of Cardew's *The Great Learning*, Cage's *Variations IV*, or Cardew's *Treatise* or Wolff's *Stones* - did not require any special training, but only the application of the *creative ability* which is inherent in us all. It was the intelligent and progressive cultivation of this creative ability, as opposed to the rote learning and regimentation so much practised by classical music 'technicians', that was so important to performing and composing in the group. Museum music has its place, just as do museums, but we weren't in the business of digging for fossils. Encouraging new insights and further originality is what we were about.

Even though the group followed very much the lines of the Scratch Orchestra, the ideas of Cage formed a philosophical backdrop to our musical ventures. In the same way that, for Cage, content determined form, so too the constituent members of AZ determined the form that the group would take for several years to come.

Politics was never very far from experimental

## THE ARTS

### Pocket kit review

By FRED BLANKS

It would be dishonest/ appropriate for me to proclaim the hubbub/ recital which was inflicted/presented by the AZ Music Teletopa Group in the Inhibidress Gallery at Woolloomooloo last night as a continuously illuminating revelation.

This acoustic melee/ event consisted of improvised electronically treated sounds randomly/purposefully groping/foraging their way into/through a thicket/pattern of wheezy/breezy sleazy/fleecy noise formulations that had a tendency to make one's ears flinch/tingle and one's mind wince/expand.

What added a special dimension to the private/ communal nightmares/ dreams of the four well-trained executants (David Ahern, Geoffrey Bernard, Geoffrey Collins, Roger Frampton) were the sexy/ adroit gyrations main-

tained with fantastic stammina by dancer Phillipa Cullen.

Her shapely silhouette (inadequately visible in the poorly/economically lit hall) wove strands of real theatre, humour and eroticism into an affair that otherwise threatened/ promised an exhausting/ exhaustive jumble/ litany of repetitive/novel methods for worrying/punctuating the golden gift of silence.

Aural imagery. Railway shunting yards. Zoo for clamorous/ amorous beasts. Creaks. Double bass being played with violin as the bow. Sleighbells. Fingernails down blackboard, amplified for multi-channel sound. Band-saw. Raspberries. Senile barrel-organ. Motor-cycle (no, that was outside). Asthma. Pointillist pizzicato. And sometimes/ often a sudden stimulating clash/ inter-course of wave lengths with the interpretative potential of ink blots in a Rohrschach Test.

The result/intention was

to cause intermittent shudders/reflections about how creatively stultifying/ visionary is the subjective and apologetic acceptance of certain ingredients in the soundscape of the brave new world, sincerely premeditated as they may be.

Let's leave it at that while we convalesce/ applaud.

**SPECIAL NOTE:** The time has come for the critic of avant-garde experiments to be granted the same aleatory liberty in interpreting what he hears as are the experimenters in what they create. Hence here is a do-it-yourself review from which everyone can concoct a version to his taste. There are over 268 million possible combinations (two to the power of 28) of which the one nearest my heart uses the first word in each of the 28 pairs of alternatives.

I offer it to Teletopa (who go to play in London in August—SCOOP) as a score on which to base their next improvisation. Chances are I'll hate/love it.

*AZ Music spurs one critic to new forms of critical practice (April 1972)...*

music. Geoffrey Barnard, a member of the improvisation group *Teletopa* (an offshoot of AZ) from Sept. of 1971 to August of 1972, has referred to improvisation as ideally a mini music-utopia, devoid of all hierarchy yet allowing total freedom for the expression of one's individuality. This freedom combined with equality is

similar to the sentiments expressed by Cage. Often this ideally anarchic situation cannot be achieved in the everyday world, yet can in music. Consequently there is no reason why we should impose our logic, our mastery over sound, nor allow it indirectly to lead those who hear it.

Other performer/composers involved in AZ were the jazzman Roger Frampton, musicians Geoffrey Collins, Peter Evans, Greg Schiemer, Linda Wilson, Sue Butler and many other performers such as Barbara Hall, Chris Ross, Phillip L. Ryan, Dierdre Evans, Geoffrey Barnard, the artist Peter Kennedy and dancer Phillipa Cullen. My own activity within the group apart from composing and performing (particularly as organist in Cardew's **The Great Learning**) included organising concert notes and publicity.

### Activities

Our first AZ activity (activity 'A' in the A - Z alphabet) occurred swiftly after the Laboratory of the Creative Ear was formed, and several members of the course took part. This was our first confrontation with the 'music loving' public and occurred on the 21-22nd February 1970. This received much newspaper coverage and was to place us at the forefront of the new *new* music. It's not surprising that the concert received the coverage it did, as it lasted 24 hours and consisted of Erik Satie's **Vexations** (a 52-beat motif to be played 840 times), Christian Wolff's **Stones** (inviting audience participation), and some of LaMonte Young's early work including **Composition 1960 #7** (consisting of a perfect 5th with the simple instruction "to be held for a long time") performed on strings.

Activity B occurred as two concerts on the 3rd and 5th of July 1970. Many members of the course took part, notably in Cage's **Imaginary Landscape no.4** and Terry Riley's **In C**. This was a celebration of the American avant garde.

Activity C followed only 2 months later on 20th September at the Pitt St. Congregational Church, and consisted of Cardew's **The Great Learning**, Paragraphs One and Seven utilising chorus, organ, whistles and stones. For both audience and critics alike this proved to be, in some ways, our most popular and awe inspiring concert. Yet, when a different paragraph of the same work was later performed at a prom concert in the Town Hall, the audience rioted, indicating how staid prom concert audiences really were.

Activity D, the Xmas activity, was held on the 19th December 1970. This was much more Cagean in nature, as Cage's **Variations IV** served as the groundplan for members' compositions. The highlight of the concert though was undoubtedly Cardew's Paragraph Six with its short, succinct sounds and its humanly intentioned simultaneity, opposing the more naturally-determined sounds allowed by Cage.

Then came the highlight of our career in many ways - the riot at the Town Hall, referred to above. This occurred during the prom concert on 16th February 1971, in which we performed Paragraph 2 of Cardew's **The Great Learning**. The many reviews and news items tell the story of this event quite dramatically. During the concert *Teletopa*, a live electronic music improvisation group formed not long

## AT THE CONCERT

# Softly they left

**WHEN the ABC's third prom concert finished last night there was no one left in the Town Hall but the performers and some of the critics.**

The audience had vanished.

There was no demonstration, no booing. The young folk simply got up and went quietly home, two by two.

They began walking out when Sydney composer David Ahern's "Teletopa Group" performed two items of modern music simultaneously.

These were his own "Live Electronic Music Im" provided" and "The Great Learning, Paragraph 2, for Chorus and Drums" by the English extremist, Cornelius Cardew.

The performance consisted of a number of drummers dotted all over

the hall beating one loud monotonous non-stop rhythm while rival choirs of singers droned like a hive of bees over megaphones.

This went on in semi-darkness for 45 minutes.

It only stopped when the house-lights went up.

Earlier, the full Town Hall had cheered Mozart's Clarinet Quintet with Donald Westlake and the Austral String Quartet, and the contemporary Japanese composer Takemitsu's "Asterism" for piano (Joyce Hutchinson) and orchestra (the SSO under John Hopkins), showing they recognised great music when they heard it.

—MARIA PRERAUER.

*Two strangely inconsistent reports of AZ Music's Prom*

before by David Ahern, improvised on stage simultaneously with the Cardew work.

*Teletopa* was to last a mere two years, but began a new era in AZ: namely that of live, continuous improvisation - music which has no beginning, climax or end, but which is merely a part of life. The group provided continuously improvised 'living' or 'live-in' sound, which was more a kind of (electronic) music that one would live *in* - as with physical space or time - rather than listen *to*. It was, according to David Ahern, "unpremeditated, structured only in the moment of its occurrence, in the instant of 'Now'."

This utopia of immediacy is easily obliterated, as our memory tends to create often unnecessary relationships in the music. It is striven for but never reached. Even though we cannot erase our memory, environment or fellow players to achieve these imaginings, there is a far richer goal - that of social and environmental involvement unshackled by the constraints of notation, regimentation, rote learning, hierarchy or 'rightness' and 'wrongness' in sound. Instead the other players, the environment and the resultant sounds become the score. Sound architecture becomes a possibility as the players make use of the acoustics of the differing environments in which they find themselves.

*Teletopa* gave its debut at the Sydney Conservatorium on the 1st March 1971 and this, like most of AZ Music's concerts, was not well received by critics. *Teletopa* performed several times that year - on 28th May during the 'E' concert (which also included Reich's **Piano Phase**), on 18th October at Inhibodress Gallery (where they played regularly), at the Electronic Music Conference at Melbourne

# CONCERT ENDS IN NEAR RIOT

By FRANK HARRIS

Last night's Prom concert had to be forcibly broken up by Town Hall attendants after audience and players tangled in the wildest scene in the seven-year history of the series.

The trouble began with the last item on the programme, *The Great Learning*, Paragraph 2, for chorus and drums by the contemporary British composer, Cornelius Cardew.

It was presented by the young Sydney composer, David Ahern, who had an electronic improvisation group on stage, several groups of singers (who intoned prolonged notes through loud-hailers) and drummers placed among the audience.

## 'Call it off'

"Essentially it is a battle between singers and drummers," Mr Ahern said.

But whatever Mr Ahern intended, all that could be heard was a monotonous din in which the drum-

mers were clear victors from the first beat.

Within minutes hundreds of Prom fans had left the hall.

Then the rest of the mob took over in a chaotic scene probably without precedent in the Town Hall's concert history.

Hundreds of people surged round the official performers, shouting and screaming them down, or dancing in mad abandon.

At 11.10 the lights went up and several attendants demanded Mr Ahern call off the show.

Angry and bitter at the outcome of his music experiment, Mr Ahern said: "I was very disappointed. I didn't expect anything like this."

Concert review: 'Mods' take a thrashing, page 24.

concert appearance on the 16th of February 1971.

University between August 8th - 13th, and later that year at Sydney's Yellow House. The foundation members of the group were David Ahern, Roger Frampton and Peter Evans, but other members of the group also included Linda Wilson, Philip L. Ryan, Geoffrey Barnard, Geoffrey Collins and Greg Matheson.

Concerts F, G and H all occurred together as 'Music Now and Then' on the 8th, 14th and 18th October 1971. F and G both occurred on the 8th, 'F' being a concert of piano pieces (Wolff, Reich, Feldman and Cage) and 'G' being a *Milo* concert (works by Frampton, Skempton, May, Hobbs and myself). It was during concert 'F' that Francis Cameron of the Conservatorium stormed on stage and locked the piano during Cage's *Piano Duet*. This was only to be followed by more 'sacrilege' as I played various off-centre realisations of the *Sonata In F* by Mozart, and entitled it *Mozart's Sonata in F* by Ernie Gallagher (1791) - thus usurping the title.

In concert H on October 14 Geoffrey Barnard premiered Alvin Lucier's *I am Sitting in a Room* despite the tape recorder refusing to co-operate, and we also performed Cardew's *Schooltime Special* and his large graphic score *Treatise*.

In the Return to Tonality concert 'I' on 14th December 1971, David Ahern's work *Stereo/Mono* was performed along with Riley's *In C*. *Stereo/Mono*, written for Roger Frampton, requires him to elicit tones on the saxophone and then, using feedback, to play along with himself. A potentiometer performer controls the result.

Concert J, on 25th February 1972, consisted once again of Cardew's *The Great Learning*, this time Paragraphs one and four. By now the old organ at

Pitt St was even more idiosyncratic in nature than in 1970 so that the sound emitted by it lent even more colour to the work than previously.

Teletopa gave another performance on 13th April at a Sound Venture concert in conjunction with the dancer Phillipa Cullen, and shortly afterwards many of us attended a UNESCO seminar on Culture and Counterculture, Youth and the Arts held in Canberra between 15th - 19th May. Here we, though mainly David Ahern, argued against the notion that music is the imposition of 'man's' intelligence and reason onto the organisation of sound, with such diehard traditionalists as Dr. Cecil Hill of Armidale. This was followed almost immediately by a composers' workshop at the NSW Conservatorium where Cardew's Paragraph 6 and *Stereo/Mono* were once again performed.

Our next 'lettered' concert did not occur until the 4th June 1972 and was designated 'K' (for 'Kage'). This concert consisted of some 14 of Cage's works, including *0'0"*, *45' for a Speaker*, along with various solos incorporated within the score to *Variations VI*. This was our largest Cage event to date, although Geoffrey Barnard organised an exclusively Cage affair in Sept. 1974 which was a realisation of *Variations IV*.

On 20th July 1972 came our 'L' concert entitled *Five Australian Composers*, although it really included six composers as my own work was played outside the main time boundaries of the concert. My work, entitled *Robert Allworth* was a realisation of 'Off-Centre Records'.

It was shortly after this concert that Teletopa went on an overseas tour, playing in such cities as Manila, London and Cambridge as part of the International Carnival of Experimental Sound Festival, and also in Tokyo. The performers at this time were David Ahern, Roger Frampton, Geoffrey Collins and Peter Evans. But there was much friction in the group, and immediately after their return to Australia late in 1972 the group was disbanded.

After this AZ Music took a new turn. Taking on a new 'professionalism', the group became known as *A-Z Music* and the process of lettering concerts was abandoned. David Ahern employed more professional musicians who lacked the background of the original AZ participants. The Cardewian philosophy which had given birth to the group was lost, as well as its spontaneous creativity. Many of the original participants either left or remained on the periphery of the group.

We did however, engage in a final performance of Cardew's *The Great Learning* paragraphs 3 and 4 in August 1975. This concert was dedicated to dancer Phillipa Cullen who died in India. It was something of a swansong for us too, as from that year on AZ (or A-Z) Music's existence was already in jeopardy.

In 1973 Ahern held the 'Tone Roads' series of concerts (Cage, Reich, Riley and Feldman) with performers such as Geoffrey Collins, John Harding, William Scarlett, Colin Piper and Peter Kyng; while in 1974 he held the 'Rug Concerts' (Cage and Reich) with Cameron Allen, Hartley Newnham, Harry Grunstein, Winsome Evans and the Jacqui Carroll dance troupe. New composers had either joined the group or were represented through having their



works performed. These newer participants were Allan Holley, Carl Vine, Cameron Allen and Robert Irving, whose work **How to Play the Piano** involving photographs of hand positions, received several hearings in A-Z concerts from mid 1972 to the final set of concerts in 1975. From the visit of Cage to Australia in March - April 1976, AZ Music may be said to have been defunct.

### A Postscript

I have mentioned that the participants in AZ brought to it their own specialities and interests. Many, such as Roger Frampton, were superb improvisors who also wrote music that inspired even greater originality. Roger's music written on a piece of soap (employing water sounds) and his **Things to Do for Musicians**, in which the instrument plays its player, inspire imagined improvisations beyond what is normally thought possible. The latter piece, along with David's **Musikit**, was included in Cardew's book



Ernie Gallagher (l) and Roger Frampton, *Stethophonics Part 1: Use of stethoscope in conjunction with bodily sounds.*

*Scratch Music* published in 1972.

My own interest, apart from electronic music, was music for listeners only, and music which showed the folly of continually and consistently reproducing the past music of dead men. My 'Bad Performance' and 'Off Centre Records' fall into this category, the intention here being to distort the music of the past so as to create a new musical experience.

In *Stethophonics* for listeners, the only instrument is a stethoscope and a resonating chamber, and I would often attend many of David Ahern's latter con-

certs armed with stethoscope and acoustic resonators (cups or glasses) to perform the listening work in the audience. The work was also performed as part of a political dinner at which Gay Lib, Black Power and Women's Lib attended. The organisers arranged a particularly upsetting dinner and handed out stethoscopes so that participants could listen in to stomach upsets. This was in October of 1972.

It is the liberation of sound, or the realisation of sound's independent existence that Cage taught. It is not the nature of sound that we alter or create in the music but merely our own listening experiences within the sound world. Music and composition just make us more acutely aware of sound.

La Monte Young, echoing these sentiments, expressed the same notion. "We must let sounds be what they are... sounds have their own existence independent of human existence... a sound does not need to be linked successively to another sound to be interesting; it is interesting in itself, and only when produced for a very long time can we learn anything from it."

The trouble is that for centuries composers have tried to force sounds to express what *they* want, their own intentions and desires, within the sound spectrum itself, rather than experiencing sounds as they arise.

Consequently the greatest achievement of AZ Music has not been in *creating* anything radically new (although this is how it can be seen) but in revealing what actually exists in sound - and in nature. It is an exposé of sound. Concert halls, and traditional music structures tend to suppress this as they distract our attention away from real and natural sounds, reducing them to the level of mere 'interruptions'. It is as though we imaginatively stand outside nature in a vain attempt to control it, rather than living with it.

Cage's notion of silence was a window to the world of sound, and was no better expressed I think, than when Greg Schiemer and I performed Cage's silent piece **4'33"** on the daytime TV show **Pot of Gold**, simultaneously with my listening piece *Stethophonics*. As no sound was emitted from the TV set, each viewer would hear sounds from his/her environment, while Greg Schiemer, on the stethoscope, would hear sounds in the studio, but also (imaginatively) in the living rooms of millions of viewers.

With the advent of New Music musicologists, however, much of Cage's and other composers' music has been misconstrued. Cage's use of silence and indeterminacy is not, as stated by the Dutch musicologist Wim Mertens, a rejection of subjectivity as the source of all evil. Humanity and nature are in this world together according to Cage, and nature does not readily submit to externally imposed human structuring. The elements of nature actively structure themselves quite adequately. There is no God through which they are passively structured and to which they must conform and the composer playing God betrays nature. So too, politically speaking, people do not submit to externally imposed social structures without also betraying themselves. Thus, Cage places humanity in the context of, but not above, nature.

Minimal music has also been criticised as symptomising 'libidinal philosophy', a philosophy

espoused by Lyotard and Gilles Deleuze in *Logique du Sens, Difference et Repetition* and no doubt *L'Anti-Oedipe*. These criticisms, which are made by the same Dutch musicologist, assume that repetitive music leads to, or engenders a breakdown of the ego, or its temporary abandonment, allowing greater control of people by ruling monopolies - and he draws on that great bogey Freud, for support. Apparently, he's afraid we'll all be caught with our ego functions down!

But monopolies rely on hierarchy and oedipal structures to exist and, in Oedipus, we internalise them. The free flow of libidinal energy, on the other hand, and the loss of a sense of clock time in the minimal music, undermine this Oedipalisation. Furthermore Deleuze cites the Schizophrenic as the true revolutionary, as she/he is a free flow of desire - liberated from the constraints of Oedipus. For him or her, every personality in history is 'I'.

I have covered - albeit quite briefly - not only most of AZ Music's activities but also some of the concepts and criticisms surrounding them and their various philosophies. The reviews, of course, tell the real story. However, I must emphasise that I am not writing this as *history*, but as *ideas*, most of which are still new to many people. Many of these ideas too, have been either intentionally or, through ignorance, unwittingly quashed by an overbearing and intransigent musical establishment epitomised by the Music Board of the Australia Council. The ideas I've referred to have not even begun to exist totally and consequently require revitalisation. The occurrences I have described may be in the past, but the concepts are not.

The past is an enigma in any case, and has no real existence *except* in our present - it is and always will be a psychic element portrayed merely by recollection or a memory. It is the way we expand our present by including in it what we know, or remember (or want) of our past. It is synthesis of the Now - of the Moment. Consequently, we must not let the past dominate us, but rather, like the improvisations referred to earlier, sculpt it into a more usable present - and a presentable future.

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## ENTERTAINMENT AND THE ARTS

# Groping (in three movements) for an idea

By FRED BLANKS

Here comes an opus in three movements headed Fantasy Prelude (five cadenzas with a brief coda), Factual Interlude (academic finger exercise) and Moral Postlude (an edifying scramble back to the dominant).

**Fantasy Prelude.** The supreme, superb, sublime, supercharged sound-lexicon of new Australian music revealed to the world by David Ahern and his AZ Music in St James Playhouse last night...

No, that sounds a trifle overdone, like a publicity hand-out. Let's start again.

The unfettered, uncommon, unconventional, undaunted collage of commercially viable sound advanced by David Ahern and his AZ Music in St James Playhouse last night...

No, that has noncommittal and patronising overtones. Let's try once more.

The irrational, inarticulate, infantile, impudent invasion of amusical noises invoked by David Ahern and his AZ Music in St James Playhouse last night...

No, critics are always told to be either adulatory or constructive by those who think these two words are synonymous. Back to the drawing-board.

With wool high-priced again, some people (count me out) might have thought it generous of

David Ahern and his AZ Music to pull so much of it over their ears in the cool St James Playhouse last night...

No, flippancy is as misplaced as jokes in church; we must at all costs preserve a straight and serious face. One final attempt.

In St James Playhouse last night, David Ahern and his AZ Music performed.

Got it perfectly that time!

**Factual Interlude** (for readers who prefer to know what makes things tick). The program consisted of the following works:

"Robert Allworth" by Ernest Gallagher. Played before main program began. Two records of Allworth creations played together, one centred correctly, the other off-centre. Heard only latter.

"A Different Time, A Different Place" by Robert Allworth, for violin (David Ahern), piano (Roger Frampton), pre-recorded violin and piano. Tape recorded played by composer. Space sounds, occasionally in tandem.

"Round" by Peter Kenny for three electric guitars (Wayne Ford, Paul Nott, Tony Styche). Common and uncommon chords in Balinese idiom, then percussive equivalent with sticks on guitars, then back to Bali. Influenced by Peter Sculthorpe, and all the better for that.

"Numbers" by Barry Conyngham. Raucous counting by three performers who begin lying on their backs. Klaxons, castanets. Objective uncertain.

"How To Play The Piano" by Robert Irving. Roger Frampton plays a score of pictures showing hands, elbows, face on a keyboard in different sizes, angles, page layouts. Communication gap between score and pianist is wide, but idea is fun.

"Boit" by Gregory Schiemer. Flashes of light cause voices to say "Boit." Stupendous.

**Moral Postlude.** As David Ahern and his suppliers grope towards a brave new world of expressing the dimensions and sensations of sound, critics grope towards a brave new way of evaluating it.

Grope, grope.

etc., etc (July 1972)...

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Contemporary Music Project

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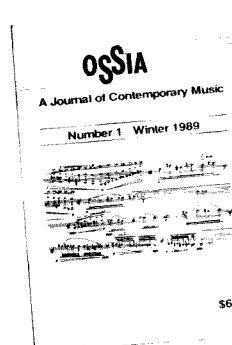
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# Sack The Opera Board

# The Rosenberg interview

Igor Lipinski

Dr. Johannes Rosenberg was born in Wagga Wagga in 1921, and undertook early studies with Mrs Grace Melba (Nellie's daughter) at the Wollongong Conservatorium of Music. At age 7 he performed Brahms' Violin Concerto in the original Sydney Opera House (which later burnt down and was subsequently replaced by a more famous one). He took private lessons with Joseph Kreisler, the immigrant brother of renowned Fritz Kreisler. At age 16 he won the Darwin International Violin Competition and in the following year took first prizes in Vienna, Leipzig, Paris and Rome. He undertook further studies with George Enesco and Jacques Nato, who called his playing: "...a spiritual experience, his tone seems to come from those regions for which other violinists have long been searching..." In 1940 he moved from Sydney to Hiroshima, where between 1940-45 he studied Calligraphy, Zen, Ikebana and became an ace flier in the Japanese Imperial Air Force. In 1946 he was invited to San Diego University to teach atomic physics and musicology. In 1949 commissioned by Toscanini and NBC to write a Violin Concerto. In 1955 he became the first violinist to climb Mt Everest. 1956 emigrated to the DDR. 1957 received the Nobel Prize for his book *Yehudi Menuhin Serves Capitalism*. 1962 first violinist to cross the Baltic in a rowboat. 1965 gave violin tuition to The Beatles. Between 1966-76 countless world tours, playing before mass audiences. 1976 invited by NASA to participate in the Voyager program: his 11th Violin Concerto formed part of the 'World Culture Package' which recently left the solar system in search of new performing venues. In 1980 contended for the US Presidency but failed due to an unfortunate mistake - there were no elections in the US that year. Disappointed with politics, religion, sport, adventuring and writing about his work, he returned to Australia where he occasionally lectures on the Second Viennese School.

**Igor Lipinski:** (with serious German accent) Doctor, first of all can I say what a great pleasure it is for us to have you here once more, in the Deutsche Demokratische Republik. You are, of course, remembered here with great affection for your dialectic masterwork *Yehudi Menuhin Serves Capitalism*. My first question is - do you still see, as extrapolated in the book, the total collapse of 'regionalism' in capitalist culture as a major component in counter-revolutionary activity against worker aesthetics in the more advanced socialist states? Or to put it another way: do you think the Republik needs more control over decadent tendencies in music right here, within our borders?

**Dr. Johannes Rosenberg:** (with broad Australian accent) First of all, Mr. Lipinski, can I say what a great pleasure it is to be back, safely behind the anti-fascist protection barrier, in the DDR. Yes, the crisis in Western culture of today was indeed predicted in my book. You know, in the West they are always making jokes about the achievements of worker states. But I tell them: when I walk in the streets of Berlin I don't see bodies lying there like I do in New York, I don't

see dispossessed blacks sleeping under sheets of corrugated iron like I do in Australia. They have treated their most important musicians (those with socialist aesthetics, I should say) in the same way. In this country, for example, the complete opposite holds true. The artist is considered a vital treasure of the people - to be nurtured, educated, sustained, guaranteed employment, honoured by the state - even allowed to travel!

*In Karl Marx Stadt is es ganz sauber. Männer mit Sperma auf den Schuhen würden dort unter gesellschaftlichen Sanktionen leiden. Die Jugendlichen sind kräftig gebaut und zeigen lebhaftes Interesse an reisenden Dichtern. Die Sehenswürdigkeiten heben auf, und die Zahnpasta kostet DDM 32,90.*

I.L. But surely stricter controls are necessary. I heard about a suspicious tourist two years ago, who had been in our country masquerading as a cellist. Luckily one of our border guards at Checkpoint Charlie is a specialist in this instrument and the suspect's fraudulent behaviour was quickly detected. His mistake was elementary - he had dust on his instrument - no correct cello player would allow that! We must be vigilant, Doctor.

The question which is still asked by your devotees in the DDR is - why does a revolutionary marxist who predicted most of contemporary music history spend his time living in a country exploited by US and Japanese imperialists? What is there to say about Australia? It is supposed to have a healthy, outgoing population. But as we see, their young athletes and swimmers are no match for our teams. Why do you remain there?

**Dr. R.** Well, in 1981 I returned to Australia from the USA and I had no real plans to stay. I went camping at Ayres Rock (or *Uluru*, as the Aborigines call it). At the time I was finishing work on a new violin concerto to which I was hoping would prove, once and for all, that my 'Unified Music Relativity Theory' was beyond argument. I left the score wrapped in a white jump suit in my tent and went over to crack a few tinnies with the folks from a nearby camp. I heard a noise in my tent and went back to investigate. As I arrived a dingo was scampering off into the darkness - the score was gone. All night long, people from around helped me look for the missing concerto, but I knew deep down it was hopeless.

Then, just before dawn came a truly hideous canine scream from the top of the rock and I knew something was up. It certainly was! In the daylight we discovered that the dingo had thrown up on the monolith, causing a hazard for tourists aiming to climb to the top. That morning was so depressing... Slowly I collected all the fragments of the fully scored out, 97 page violin concerto. I filled four Eskys before



a strong wind blew up. At that moment, I realised in a visionary flash that it should remain unfinished and, yes - a quartet: four Eskys, four parts, four players...

I was struck by the timely ambiguity: four pleas for understanding in polystyrene polyphony; the desert was endless and the concerto was dead; what was the difference; what was the point? The point was the rock, or indeed the rock had a point, or at least the point was taken - had I covered the point, or was it the dingo who had covered the rock? And what about the pleas blowin' in the wind with six sides to every question and sixpicks all round? Was it time to call in a dated, French art theorist? At what cost is art?

*Auch sonst ist es preiswert in Erfurt. Für DDM 1,72 kann man ein ganzes Jahr lang eine Dreizimmerwohnung in der Fuggerei bewohnen, aber nur, wenn man unverschuldet in Not geraten ist. Die anderen, die wie ich und du an ihrer Not selber schuld sind, können sich aber immerhin noch am Erfrischungsstand im Siebentischwald für lächerliche 30pfg eine Schleckpulverstange holen, an der man zu dritt eine ganze Stunde lang Schleckspass hat. Nun bin ich wieder daheim in meiner Klause und warte auf Einladungen, z.B. aus Rendsburg, Ravensburg und Ratzeburg. Oder aus Singen, Bingen und Lingen. Oder Bad Berkapunkt, Warthapunkt, und Speienpunkt. Naja, der DDR ist so einfach reisen.*

I was struck again, this time as if by a ball from Dennis Lillee. I had stumbled into the four dimensional space/time thingumajig - again. This country of Australia was already creating the music of the future without even knowing. Music for holidays! Better: music for package holidays - the Travelogue Sound! Of course, it is clear that right from the beginning of white settlement this has been the main priority of all meaningful Australian composers. The works of Hill were, without doubt, written to step up the rate of immigration. When his seductive music was performed in London, it was sponsored by the Far Eastern Shipping Co., desperately trying to attract customers to Melbourne. Percy Grainger too was obsessed with holidays - always looking for mountains and writing them into his scores. If one translates **Handel in the Strand** into German the correct meaning becomes clear: Handel on the Beach!

But it is when we come to the postwar situation that the reality of travelogue music becomes so evident. In the 50s the main holiday thrust was still Europe - as soon as the immigrants landed they realised their mistake and wanted to sail back again. It was the music of Australian composers which kept them there, spinning fantasies of British royalty, Parisian cuisine, Italian choirboys, Viennese Cafe and happy go lucky serialism from that sparkling fun town of Düsseldorf. Then in the 60s and 70s it was the turn of the new, expanding airlines to bring Australian travelogue music to international fruition.

Headsets and airport lounges were full of Chinese gongs, Gamelan metallophones, spacey string sections, bamboo flutes, clap sticks, didgeridoos, and other package holiday memorabilia. In fact anybody who could hit a clay pot with a stick was offered employment with KLM, Singapore Airlines, Qantas, Air Garuda or the Music Board of the Australia Council. The great 'runway' composer names were the bait for holiday makers on the other side of the checkin

counter. It hasn't stopped there, either. Australian jazz musicians are leading the world in cut price charter flights. Who can compete with those electrifying avant garde jazzmen? Just seeing them click their fingers in 4/4 at the start of a song is enough to make me want to catch the first available flight to the other side of the world. Now that's really the way to sell airline tickets.

I.L. Doctor, doctor. Excuse me but I am confused. You are suddenly sounding like a reactionary capitalist lackey. This situation in Australia is a nightmare. What about your socialist principles, what about the future of music? I am disgusted!

**Dr. R.** *Mir persönlich ist das zwar egal, aber da ich schon lange auf dem Wege bin, bei den geistig regeren Vertretern der deutschen Jungeleutschaft als moralische Instanz zu gelten, möchte ich hier darauf hinweisen, dass, wenn man etwas Falsches gesagt hat, man das richtigstellen muss. Also...*

Dear Mr. Lipinski, it is a question of numbers. The logic is completely clear. You can't fight it. I have worked through a series of algorithms (incorporated in the Unified Music Relativity Theory) and it is sure that by the year 2019 Australia will have more qualified composers and jazz musicians (relative to population density) than any other country in the world. It will also have more music centres, jazz co-ordinators, committees, reports on committees, teachers, reports on teacher workshops, librarians, reports on co-ordinating workshops, and four times as many courses in composition and jazz.

Even at today's level, with hundreds of qualified composers and jazz musicians leaving our institutions every year, we will have over 70,000 by the turn of the century. What a wonderful achievement! By this time, too, we will have eradicated the messy business of performing - so no musician will actually have to *produce* anything. When they work, they will work as tour guides for the package holiday conglomerates. But most of the time of course, they will be on holiday themselves. It's a perfect solution and I did predict it in the *Menuhin* book - if you read it carefully. I think it is the logical development of a worker state - but it will happen in Australia first and not the DDR as I previously thought. Relax Lipinski, and enjoy the flight.

"Welcome to channel six on Interflug 119 bound for Sydney. This is the entertainment channel. The music you are hearing is by one of Australia's best known young composers, Johannes Rosenberg. It is his **Sonatina** for viola d'amore, voice, and two empty halves of a large coconut shell. With live interactive video by Tooheys..."

*Ich bin die Isabella. Ich habe lange rote Haare, grüne Augen, bin 1,70 gross und sehr kurvig gebaut. Urlaub gefällt mir gut! Was kann ich für dich tun? Du möchtest wissen, wie's funktioniert? Also du kannst bei mir ein völlig tabuloses, geiles, erotisches Gespräch führen, bei dem wir beide zum Orgasmus kommen. Wo hast du eigentlich gefahren? Mmmh. Schön. Stell dir vor, ich lege mich jetzt zu dir ins Bett. Ich bin ganz nackt. Bitte, streichle mir über meine Brüste. Mmmh. Gut. Und die Musik? So toll, nicht?*

# AZ it was

Geoffrey Barnard

In any discussion of AZ Music - what its significance was in the broader context of contemporary music, internationally, during its existence, how (and why) it came into being, perhaps the ramifications (if any) that are felt today some 14 years after its demise - it is essential to bear in mind from the outset that AZ actually comprised two distinct phases in its (almost) six year history: the first running from its inception in February 1970 to August 1972, and the second roughly from the beginning of 1973 to the end of 1975. This article deals exclusively with that first (formative) phase of AZ Music.

*Sounds come and go.* AZ music grew out of the free weekly class in experimental music - the Laboratory of the Creative Ear - which David Ahern started at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music in February 1970, in much the same way as The Scratch Orchestra developed out of Cornelius Cardew's class at Morley College the previous year. Not insignificantly, Ahern had just returned from overseas, London in particular, having been involved with the Scratch Orchestra from the time it was founded. *Listening with a bent ear, I retain the memory of some, not all.* The influence of Cardew on our activities in the class was paramount, with emphasis on

non-elitist, non-hierarchical forms of music-making, essentially for people without the 'benefit' of a formal 'musical' education. The concerns of La Monte Young relating to audition and the psycho-acoustic by-products of the auditory process were also very prevalent. *Standing at one point in the universe, notate what you hear with what you see.*

Writing on the history of The Scratch Orchestra, Rod Eley is quick to point out that the nucleus of the Morley College composers "were dissatisfied with the elitism of 'serious' music and its strong class image, and with the repression of working musicians into the role of slavish hacks churning out the stock repertoire of concert hall and opera house". Certainly a number of us attending Ahern's class on a regular basis felt that, by means of our activities, we were subverting bourgeois cultural values. Essentially we reacted against the tyranny of the self-contained music-object, not only that which had emerged out of the tradition of tonal functional harmony, but also that which embodied the authoritarianism of serialism and subsequent developments in European contemporary composition.

*A catalogue is an ordered representation of what you hear and what you see.* Right from the start in these classes, the essence of music-making was explored. Notions about the identity of a piece of music, the ontological status of scores, the function of notation and the relationship of composition to improvisation were thrown up and re-assessed through our efforts in both composition and performance. *Composing's one thing, performing's another, listening's a third. What can they have to do with one another?* 'Compositions' were primarily verbal, though some graphic scores were produced, but the emphasis in the main was on *improvisation rites, glees and catalogues*, with some very interesting work being done by Peter Evans, Roger Frampton and artist Peter Kennedy. *Glees are patterns and preparations for song. They are plans for action - vocal chord action.*

AZ Music 'officially' came into being with the presentation of a 24-hour concert at Watters Gallery in East Sydney over the weekend of 21-22 February 1970. This temporal 'block' was defined by a performance of Erik Satie's *Vexations*, against which works by American composers (La Monte Young's *Trio for Strings* 1958, *Composition 1960 #7* and *Composition 1960 #9* - and Christian Wolff's *Stones*, from his *Prose Collection* of 1968-69) were realised. Duration, then, became a 'concrete' dimension in itself, affirming the thrust of Young's music towards (perpetuating) a sense of 'timelessness'. *I think that music is now able to be not so much 'listened to' but 'existed in'.* Pianist Peter Evans stopped playing after the 595th repetition and was replaced by Linda Wilson, who completed the performance. *I felt each repetition slowly wearing my mind away. I had to stop. If I hadn't stopped I'd be a very different*

## GLEES (cont.)

Using your voice, make tiny objects move.

Peter Evans.

Once you have realised  
that it is impossible to  
move large objects  
with your voice.....

Peter Evans.

Mrs. Lockhart.

While walking or running, along or on the spot, listen for a while, to the sounds made by each foot as they make contact with something.

If regular, imitate them with the voice. If irregular, try to anticipate them and, with the voice, sound them at the same time as they occur.

If you feel your own feet are unsatisfactory, use someone else's.

Roger Frampton.

Construct a chord of three sounds.  
The first is the memory of the second.  
The third is the future of the first.  
Play simultaneously.  
Stop when the sounds merge to one.

David Ahern.

*Glees by Peter Evans, Mrs Lockhart, Roger Frampton and David Ahern.*

*person today...People who play it do so at their own peril.*

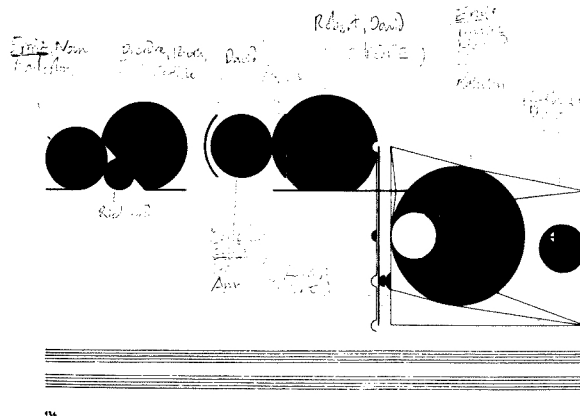
Over the next two and a half years, AZ went on to propagate much of the music that has since been documented by Michael Nyman in his book *Experimental Music*: indeterminate compositions by John Cage (in particular his **Imaginary Landscape No 4** (1952) for 12 radios and 24 players and his **Concert for Piano and Orchestra** 1957-58), Christian Wolff and Morty Feldman; live electronic music; the 'new tonality' of Terry Riley (**In C**) and Steve Reich (**Piano Phase**); Cardew's **The Great Learning** (1968-70), Paragraphs 1, 2, 4, 6 and 7, as well as a fragment of his graphic score **Treatise** (1963-67); free electronic-acoustic improvisation (following the formation of the group Teletopa); works by local composers, particularly David Ahern, Roger Frampton and Ernie Gallagher.

During this period, the 'noisicians' of AZ were to acquire a reputation as the 'enfants terribles' of the Sydney music scene and were constantly ridiculed in the press by critics who accused us of deliberately inflicting various forms of aural air pollution on a gullible and unsuspecting public. Our notoriety increased considerably during 1971 by virtue of two separate incidents which bear recounting in some detail.

At the Sydney Proms in February, an augmented AZ ensemble took part in a realisation of Paragraph 2 of Cardew's **The Great Learning**, simultaneously with the first public improvisation of the group *Teletopa*. While the four members of Teletopa were up on the stage of the Sydney Town Hall, the five groups required by the Cardew composition (each comprising a drummer and a number of singers) were placed at various points in the body of the hall. As critic Roger Covell remarked in his review of the night's events, it was the first time in the local history of the series that the audience did actually promenade. However, the dissent of many in the audience was not confined to merely 'promenading right out the door'. A good number were overtly aggressive, jostling performers, snatching drumsticks out of their hands or tipping water on them from the upstairs balconies. The Town Hall guards joined in the occasion, and one such charismatic individual (who bore an uncanny resemblance to Dan Blocker's *Hoss* from the TV series *Bonanza*, both in his physique and good looks) threatened to break me in two if I didn't pack up my gear and clear out. As he succinctly put it: "The show's over"!

In October that year, a realisation of Cage's **Piano Duet** by Roger Frampton and Geoffrey Collins took place in the Conservatorium's Verbrugghen Hall. The score used was that of **Cartridge Music** (1960), whereby contact microphones are to be attached to the body of a grand piano - which necessitated putting music stands, kitchen utensils, pillows and sheets of plastic inside the piano. This was too much for the assistant director of the Conservatorium, Francis Cameron, to bear. Horrified at the "vandalism" being inflicted on the Conservatorium's precious Steinway, he jumped up on stage during the performance, locked the lid of the piano and pocketed the key, a red carnation quivering indignantly in his lapel.

The music that typified this initial phase of AZ was clearly the antithesis of the music of such contemporary composers as Boulez, Berio, Stockhausen, Xenakis, Birtwistle or Maxwell Davies, "conceived and executed along the well-trodden but sanctified path of the post-Renaissance tradition" (Nyman), where the relationships between components within each composition are of prime concern. Running very much against the propensity for creating aesthetic objects were Cage's ideas regarding process and the bringing into play of sounds free (for the most part) of fixed relations between each other, and the endeavour (in theory, at least) to blur the distinctions between composers; performers and listeners. *A music requiring particular attention to listening among performers, to coordinating, to developing a sense of timing - when to lead, when to remain silent, when to join, each of these available to any performer.* Perhaps the pertinent aspect of so many indeterminate and improvised works is that they offer themselves implicitly, by means of their very structure, as "models of classlessness in opposition to [economic] class domination"<sup>2</sup>, affirming a stance



*A page from Cardew's Treatise annotated for performance.*

that is essentially anarchistic.

AZ Music, then, was both a flexible body of performers of varying ability and an entrepreneurial organisation. The 'inner sanctum' of AZ was always a quite separate entity from the body of people who attended Ahern's class, though naturally there was bound to be a considerable overlap in terms of the specific individuals involved. Having been 'obliged' to move from its original premises at the Conservatorium after only a matter of weeks, the class eventually became 'formalised' under the auspices of WEA and continued to provide a pool of performers required by such large-scale works as **The Great Learning** through 1971 and into 1972. It was out of the remnants of the second WEA 'terms' that the Sunday Ensemble emerged<sup>3</sup>. Those of us who made up the entrepreneurial coterie were responsible not only for organising all the AZ concerts - and besides determining the 'content' in each case, this involved the spade work necessary for securing suitable venues - but also were actively engaged in designing posters, brochures and the like, compiling program notes and

seeing to the distribution of such advertising material in accordance with AZ Music's extensive mailing list.

Despite Ahern's standing as a composer prior to the formation of AZ - by virtue of such works as **After Mallarmé**, **Music for Nine**, **Ned Kelly Music**, **Network** and **Journal** - he was to compose only one major work during these early years of AZ Music, **Stereo/Mono**. This is a live electronic work written in 1971 for wind soloist, who is required to not only elicit high, medium or low feedback tones through one or both loudspeakers for specific durations (long, medium or short), but also to interact with these feedback tones or to substitute an acoustic instrumental tone for that of a feedback tone. Written in a graphic (or symbolic) notation, **Stereo/Mono** bears the influence of such compositions as Stockhausen's **Spiral** and **Prozession**, while ultimately forging a link with the work of American composers David Behrman (**Wave Train**) and Gordon Mumma (**Hornpipe**). The work received its premiere realisation in December 1971 by soloist Roger Frampton playing saxophone and saxorecorder (a plastic recorder fitted with a saxophone mouthpiece), with



*Stethophonics Part 2 - The use of the stethoscope in conjunction with acoustic resonators. Ernie Gallagher*

Ahern controlling the potentiometer.

Pieces such as **Stereo/Mono** reflected AZ's move away from composition per se towards a playing situation weighted in favour of improvisation. One tendency did emerge within the group that was, in effect, at variance with this general direction. The highly idiosyncratic projects propounded by Ernie Gallagher challenged the traditional composer/performer/listener configuration and accordingly placed the listener at the centre of the creative process. His off-centre record project (1971) required a hole punched slightly off-centre in any 33  $\frac{1}{3}$ , 45 or 78 rpm recordings and for the re-designed discs to then be played on suitable audio equipment. Even though two off-centre realisations - **Sonata in F by Mozart** and **Robert Allworth** - were given hearings in traditional concert situations (in 1971 and 1972 respectively), his off-centre record project and subsequent compositions concern themselves with personal auditory explorations without necessary reference to usual performer/audience contexts. The performer, in fact, becomes redundant. These personal listening experiences extend into a completely private realm in *Stethophonics* (1971-72), where a standard

binaural stethoscope is (primarily but not exclusively) used in conjunction with an acoustic resonator to alter the sound(s) of the aural environment as perceived by the listener, the transformation of the awareness of the listener being constituted as a form of 'content' in itself.

*What is improvisation?* The improvisation group Teletopa was founded in the spring of 1970. The nucleus of the group consisted of Ahern, Evans and Frampton, though at various stages over the following two years membership included Linda Wilson, Philip L Ryan, myself and Geoffrey Collins. *Does it have anything to do with improving?* The name 'Teletopa' was derived from the Greek *topos*, "as used by Plato, meaning 'the place of the origin of ideas; *tele*, a prefix meaning 'far, distant, an openness to any ideas whatsoever'" (Phillip L Ryan). And as Ahern would insist, implicit in the prefix *tele* was the ensemble's global outlook, a willingness and a readiness to use sound materials found in every corner of the world. *Take away notation and what have you got?* Teletopa, in essence, was a 'pure' electro-acoustic improvisation group, utilising contact microphones to amplify all sound sources, from traditional instruments such as violin, saxophone and flute, to various percussive devices, sheets of tin, glass and masonite, metal and plastic materials, vacuum cleaner and shortwave radio. *Bibbidy, Bobbidy, Boo?*

The in-performance characteristic of Teletopa - of seeking or questing after new sounds - was fraught with danger, yet this precariousness was inevitable, an intrinsic part of the very fabric of free improvisation. *We are searching for sounds and for the responses that attach to them, rather than thinking them up, preparing them and producing them. The search is conducted in the medium of sound and the musician himself is at the heart of the experiment.* As Ernie Gallagher remarked at the time, sounds "are discarded as soon as they are created because of the danger of becoming known, or becoming knowable. This uncertainty is essential to a live, as distinct from preserved, performance."<sup>4</sup>

Teletopa perpetuated a viable, open form of music-making which hinged on the integrity and self-discipline of the players for its success or otherwise. The improvisations, like so much of Christian Wolff's music, retained the notion of musical performance as a "dynamic, social activity", *self-realisation coming about through a social process*. Yet Teletopa was probably more like the English group AMM (with which Cardew was associated during the late 1960s), both musically and in terms of its social structure, than other groups in existence at the time such as Musica Elettronica Viva (US/Italy) or the Taj Mahal Travellers (Japan): "extremely self-contained and private, basically hostile to 'out-siders'" (Nyman). While Teletopa, in its two years, only performed publicly on a small number of occasions, the group would play on a regular weekly basis behind closed doors at the Inhibodress Gallery in Woolloomooloo. *Connected with this is the proposition that improvisation cannot be rehearsed. Training is substituted for rehearsal, and a certain moral discipline is an essential part of this training.* It was here that the regular members of Teletopa were often joined by Greg



Matheson, who (rumour has it) would ride his push-bike across the Nullabor to Sydney from Perth, seeking respite from post-graduate studies in Psychology.

In August 1972, several members of Teletopa (Ahern, Frampton and Collins) embarked on a two month overseas tour in conjunction with the International Carnival of Experimental Sound (ICES) in England, linking up there with Peter Evans. Sadly, a marked contradiction became apparent between the implicit anarchistic orientation of Teletopa, with its sense of communality and reliance on mutual aid within the group, and the actual playing situation which had emerged. And despite Ahern's professed Utopian vision of a world "in which communication is free and spontaneous between human beings", Gavin Bryars made the observation, reviewing one of Teletopa's improvisations at London's Round House,



David Ahern, c.1974

that certain members of the group "would play in an heroically dramatic way which gave a sustained *hierarchical* view of their music-making (unlike early AMM music in which this was also present, the relationship did not significantly change in that David Ahern maintained a *dominant* role...<sup>6</sup>"). As a consequence, irreconcilable differences arose between specific individuals in the group, leading ultimately to the disbanding of Teletopa.

From the beginning of 1973, AZ Music took a completely different path, in effect the antithesis of the original directions AZ had taken. The idealism which endeavoured to bring about a set of contexts whereby "concepts such as the specialised performer and concert-giving itself start to fall apart" (Ahern), gave way to a new phase that re-affirmed the conventional concert situation. This second

phase of AZ Music was characterised by an emphasis on through-composition, particularly the work of young Australian composers Cameron Allan, Robert Irving, Allan Holley and Carl Vine, the dissemination of these Pieces in such 'respectable' venues as the Recording Hall of the Sydney Opera House and the hiring of professional musicians.

Looking back, however, the significance of Ahern during these years (1970-75) should not be underestimated. In fact, what Feldman said of Cardew in 1967 could justifiably have been claimed in relation to Ahern several years later: "If the new ideas in music are felt today as a movement in [Australia], it's because he acts as a moral force, a moral centre."<sup>7</sup> Yet it was the activities of AZ Music specifically during those early years that were "too thorny for the Australian musical establishment to handle<sup>8</sup>", an establishment presided over by people such as Donald Peart and saturated with the residue of late-Romantic English composition. Paradoxically, the ideas of Cardew, giving vent to peculiarly *English* sensibility - arising, as they did, out of a tradition of amateur music-making - were transposed into a local context and served to underpin the radical diversions of AZ Music.

#### Footnotes

1. Eley, R. "A History of The Scratch Orchestra", in Cornelius Cardew, **Stockhausen Serves Imperialism** Latimer New Dimensions London 1974 p.12
2. Metzger, HK. "Essay on Prerevolutionary Music", in the booklet accompanying the 4-record set **Music Before Revolution** (HMV 1 C 165-28 954/57Y)
3. The Sunday Ensemble was one of two subgroups to emerge out of AZ Music (the other one being Teletopa), whose membership consisted of the following individuals: Deirdre Evans, Ernie Gallagher, Greg Schiemer, Kathie Drake, Robert Irving, Ruth, Ann and Richard Lucas, John and Nan Sundbury and Malcolm Smith.
4. Gallagher, E. "The State of the Art" in **Music Maker** vol.38 no.29 (October 1971) p.28
5. See Christopher Fox, "Music as Social Process: some aspects of the work of Christian Wolff" in **Contact** 30 (Spring 1987)
6. Bryars, G. "ICES" (review) in **Music and Musicians** December 1972 p.72, emphasis added
7. Feldman, F. "Conversations without Stravinsky" in **London Magazine** March 1967 p.88
8. See Richard Toop, "The Concert Hall Avant Garde: Where Is It?" **Art Network** 6, Winter 1982

# Interview with Keith Humble

*John Whiteoak*

In 1989, the year of Keith Humble's retirement as Founding Professor of Music at Latrobe University, many of the younger generation of contemporary Australian composers probably perceive him to be a relatively conservative institutionally based composer. Yet Humble's own peers would argue that the notion he brought back to Australia in 1966 regarding composition, performance, music education and the role of the composer in society were very radical, particularly in a context where, to quote Felix Werder, "...neither the composer, the critic, nor the listener [knew] the difference between Webern and Weber"<sup>1</sup>. Werder and others consider that Humble's arrival represented a major turning point for contemporary music in Melbourne; but more significantly, Humble also believes these views were radical at the time. He continues to hold these views and believes they are still radical.

The following sketch is intended to provide a context for the interview, which centres on one aspect of Humble's often controversial role in Australian contemporary music: the educational/music making activities he initiated at the Grainger Museum during 1966/7. Of these activities, I place particular emphasis on the Society For The Private Performance Of New Music (SPPNM)<sup>2</sup>.

In 1956, the year that the Olympic games were held in Melbourne, Humble returned from a successful period of study in France (1951-) to take up a position at the Melbourne Conservatorium. He returned to Paris the following year deeply disturbed that, while he may have had the knowledge, he lacked the practical experience to "...make any contribution whatsoever to a pioneer situation". He was also concerned by the low status of music making and education in Australia, and the conservatism and 'cultural cringe' implied by the social isolation imposed on Percy Grainger at Melbourne University. Humble's suggestion that Grainger, the most radical and significant musician Australia had ever produced, be asked to write a piece for the opening for the Olympic Games was treated with scorn.

After his return to Paris in 1957, Humble began to explore the notion of a cultural centre which could host workshop performances with a particular emphasis on artistic interaction. By 1959 he had established the Centre De Musique, which very soon gained an international reputation for the presentation of contemporary repertoire. The centre also became involved in a range of music and music/theatre projects, including Marc'O's improvised theatre group. By observing Marc'O's working methods, Humble discovered how, through repeated improvisations, intuitive group response will eventually

draw more or less random elements together to define structure. The end product of this process is one aspect of the 'frozen improvisation' that Humble refers to in the interview.

Although Humble's arrival in Melbourne in March 1966 has been described as a major turning point for contemporary music in Melbourne, a local contemporary movement was already established here and was gaining momentum. Until 1965, this activity centred around a small coterie of fairly established local composers including George Dreyfus, whose New Music Ensemble often presented works by local composers. Parallel to this activity jazz musicians, notably Bruce Clarke, Barry McKimm, Robert Rooney and Syd Clayton had begun to experiment with contemporary music concepts in their improvisations, including tone-rows and later, graphic scores.

Humble had visited Melbourne in late '64 and conducted a workshop at the Conservatorium, where he demonstrated some aspects of the approach used at the Centre de Musique. A Melbourne branch of the ISCM was formed soon after, and throughout '65 it presented concerts and seminars, including a lecture demonstration of electronic and tape techniques by Bruce Clarke. Richard Meale had also begun to broadcast 'recordings and tapes of modern and experimental music' on his ABC radio program *First Time Here*.

There is some evidence that by 1966, more conservative elements within the ISCM wished to distance themselves from the activities of the younger composers who favoured a more experimental, or exploratory approach. At an ISCM open forum on 'The Direction of Australian Composition' in late '65, McKimm, Rooney and Clayton, who had recently performed at an ISCM concert, were referred to obliquely as "charlatans", and more directly as "angry young men". They were told: "you may as well go outside and listen to the sounds in Bourke Street", to which Clayton replied "maybe you should, it might open your ears!"<sup>3</sup> In a slightly 'tongue in cheek' review of the concert in question, Adrian Rawlins complains bitterly that "...a work by Clive O'Connell, one of Melbourne's most vigorous young composers and...the hippest..." was omitted from the program. He refers to the ISCM as the "Insensitive Society For the Censure of Creative Musicians"<sup>4</sup>. Richards Meale's broadcasts had also apparently fallen out of favour with the 'angry young men', because he was perceived to be unenthusiastic about Cage and other more exploratory composers<sup>5</sup>.

In March 1966 Humble arrived back in Melbourne to again take up a position at the Conservatorium and, soon after, established the Society for the

Private Performance of New Music. The SPPNM, amongst other things, provided an important outlet for the more exploratory of Melbourne's young composers, including O'Connell, McKimm, Rooney and Clayton. The SPPNM usually functioned in the following manner: Society members arranged the basic preparation of their pieces amongst themselves and would all meet at the Grainger Museum on the day of the (monthly) concert. These 'concerts' were in fact performance workshops directed by Humble, or sometimes by the composer of the work. SPPNM programs indicate that most of the initial influx of young composers had drifted away from the Society by mid 1967.

The SPPNM and other activities which Humble established at the Grainger Museum during 1966/7 were a demonstration of important concepts he had developed since his first unsuccessful period at the Conservatorium in 1956, in particular the concept of the interactive workshop. The resurrection and use of the disgracefully neglected Grainger Museum for these activities was an explicit gesture towards the self-effacing attitude that Australia has to its own musical past. Finally, as with most of Humble's musical projects, the Grainger Museum activities were all ongoing experiments.

**J.W.** In James Murdoch's biography<sup>6</sup>, he mentions that when you returned to Paris in 1957 it was with a notion of the performance workshop concept. Where did that come from?

**K.H.** It came from my observations in Australia during the fifties. I had a certain amount of experience on the European circuit and quite obviously even the great artists did not play just in Paris, Rome and London, they gave concerts in provincial towns and small centres - often very small centres. It seemed to me a question of how we could duplicate that environment, given the Australian situation. After all, you play in Sydney, Adelaide and Melbourne - and that's it! You do it the second year and where else do you go? - obviously you have to go away. So it wasn't viable to give three concerts a year, you have to give many more concerts. And so, the notional idea of the *Centre de Musique* was born out of what I considered to be a necessity with regard to development of music in Australia. I think it's still applicable to have workshops or small cultural centres in regional areas that are active musically in the local environment, and therefore create an environment for visiting artists, and a place for them to perform. This was the model for the Centre de Musique. What is interesting is that its success has never been duplicated to this day<sup>7</sup>.

**J.W.** So the type of music workshopped at the centre - was the thrust always towards contemporary music or was it broadly based, musically?

**K.H.** It was always a broad spectrum. It was contemporary, in that all 'music making' is contemporary, as distinct from music repetition. By that, I mean that we were not trying to repeat something that was currently popular - the flavour of the month. We played operas like *The Reformed Drunkard* and other pieces that were no longer in the repertoire. This had

nothing to do with the value of the music, but had everything to do with the fact that, if you've got a large opera house where you have to seat six or seven hundred people, you can hardly put on an opera where you need the resources of about 12 or 13 people. It seemed to me that a lot of music was being played, not because it was good or bad music, but just because it was music that was economically viable. In contrast, we could dip into any period of music, simply because we were not involved with the economics of music. From the contemporary music point of view, this was extremely important - because we were consequently not politically involved<sup>8</sup>.

**J.W.** So the main thrust of the centre was not towards - I won't use the word experimental - towards exploratory music?

**K.H.** Everything that we did was experimental! - and everything we did in our productions - or whatever - was 'music now'!

**J.W.** You arrived back here in roughly March '66, and it seems that in late '64 you were in Melbourne briefly, and were invited by George Dreyfus to give a 'composers workshop' where you conducted several pieces. It has also been mentioned that this was likely to have been the catalyst for the formation of a Melbourne branch of the ISCM<sup>9</sup>.

**K.H.** Yes.

**J.W.** You didn't come back to a musical vacuum - there was something happening in new music; but that would have only been happening since mid '64 at the earliest?

**K.H.** Certainly in '64 there was a desire on the part of George Dreyfus, Jamie Murdoch and others in Melbourne, to put musical life onto a more positive footing. George, amongst others, had organised this workshop kind of thing - this 'platform'. I was delighted about that, because everything I'd been doing in Paris previously, as I said, had come from a notional idea I'd had with regard to Australian music. It was nice to come back, not so much to demonstrate what I had been doing in Europe, but to say: "Look, this is what I have been doing in Europe - see how pertinent it is to Australia". If that assisted in the creation of a climate which helped these musicians, then that's great! And yet, when I came back in 1966, the nucleus of a contemporary music movement was already formed. Trying to find what the potentials and possibilities were took some time, but there was obviously lots more happening at this stage, than in 1964.

**J.W.** Nevertheless, I still get the impression from interviews and reviews that there was a sense of frustration among younger composers - that there still wasn't a suitable context for them.

**K.H.** I would say, not just among younger composers, among composers in general. There was not the format, there was not the platform. I don't necessarily think a composer needs a platform for something, but

if you don't have a platform then you can't be *against* something! There was a kind of 'drift' of events, and the idea of establishing the ISCM was a good idea because it, at least, produced the idea of a society, something that provided a focus.

**J.W.** Well, just to step back to your arrival in Melbourne to take a position at Melbourne University. Laughton Harris describes your return as a "veritable hypodermic" for Australian music in general<sup>10</sup>. But, the thing that I want to approach today is the idea of you coming back as a 'radical' into this environment and expressing your radicalism by trying to educate.

**K.H.** Yes, I think I was a radical and I think I still am a radical - and I don't think my radicalism has changed whatsoever since then. I think that what has changed is people's expectations of what a radical should be and particularly from what Australians thought was radical at the time<sup>11</sup>. The type of radicalism I was accused of, such as neo Dadaism, was included in what I had in mind, but it was only *included* - it was not *the* thing I had in mind. Also it must be remembered that for the whole period of time that I have worked in Australia, I assumed an academic position. I have always felt a responsibility which was basically: as I believed that all education was subversive, then subversion had to be treated in such a way that I always took the responsibility for the student. The student should be encouraged to find - live her life, rather than have me just put across my own particular preference. Whether that tempered my musical output or not, others will judge; my personal opinion is that it didn't. Although, throughout my whole academic life I have paid the penalty for that approach - and I have suffered.

**J.W.** To go into that in a bit more detail: two of the things you did on arriving back to Australia was first: setting up the Society for the Private Performance of New Music (SPPNM), and, secondly, setting up an Electronic workshop - and they were both based at the Grainger Museum. Now the SPPNM has been described as an extension of your classes, but obviously it was more than that. There were people taking part in that activity who were not students - and some of these played a prominent part in, and had their pieces performed frequently in these concerts<sup>10</sup>.

**K.H.** Well, let me put it to you this way. Just as it has been said of the *Domaine Musicale* under Boulez and also the Centre de Musique under my own direction: both were considered to be educational programs to the environment that they were set in. My attitude to education, and particularly if I wanted to give my students a model was: since there was no model in the Australian music scene, I had to develop one to put before them, so that they would see that education was not just in the classroom, but went into the community, and the community at large. And so, the way of doing that was, in the first place, the Society for the Private Performance of New Music. This was not meant to be an imitation of the Society for the Private Performance of New Music that Schoenberg had established in the twenties, or of the Society for the Per-

formance of New Music which was a contemporary music platform in London. The Melbourne SPPNM was to be a platform for young musicians, or for musicians generally who wanted to become involved, and to consider whatever music they were playing not just as a repetitive exercise, or as something to be reproduced, but as a living and live musical experience - the direct experience of a musical event - that was what the SPPNM was about. You're right also that it had another aim, likewise with the Electronic workshop. The aim was that it would be based in the Grainger Museum. I was *adamant* that the Percy Grainger Museum should be opened, even if this meant holding classes in the Grainger Museum - which we did, with those orchestration classes we had at the time. It was cold - freezing, but I wanted the place to be used! All of these things were, as much as anything, to draw attention to the fact that music in Australia did not begin in 1966, it had a tradition which also involved Percy Grainger - and Grainger was not just some kind of crazy crackpot or extrovert. I wanted to draw attention, via the Grainger Museum, that we have a musical tradition.

**J.W.** Well, considering that the Grainger Museum hadn't been operating for some time, and when you consider the content of the SPPNM programs, I can't help but wonder whether this action would have been fully supported by the established Faculty.

**K.H.** I don't think it was! The point was that I'd learnt a lesson in France which served me very well in Australia - when you think about it, I learnt it from Percy Grainger himself. Years ago, in an interview, Percy was asked about his relationship with his publishers. He said: "I have a perfect relationship with my publishers". When pressed further, he said: "Well I didn't ask them to do anything, I paid for everything." Now there's the whole point - that's exactly what I did. I mean, paying for it doesn't necessarily mean with money - I paid for it in kind. That's another story, because it had its repercussions later on.

**J.W.** One of the problems you would have encountered arriving in 1966 were those people who were on the one hand interested in composition, very enthusiastic, but also lacking performance skills and fundamental musical knowledge - you were dealing with quite a few of these people with the SPPNM. Now, considering that you came back as an established composer and performer, with very high standards and a reputation, did this present a problem: trying to deal with a relatively low level of performance - a high level of enthusiasm - at the same time trying to maintain your reputation for maintaining high standards?

**K.H.** I was lucky in the sense that I had a young colleague, Jean-Charles Francois in France who had a more radical platform than myself in relation to the composition/performance of contemporary music. He particularly wanted to go to the United States, but I said: "Don't go to the United States straight away, come to Australia." So he did come to Australia. He had a platform which was basically: it really didn't matter how much talent you had, it was a question of



getting the work done. He persisted, and he worked very very hard while he was here. He also had to realise that there was, culturally, a difference between that French idea of: it didn't matter if you were professional or not, you learnt mechanically to play an instrument, and you learnt in life to be efficient, whereas in Australia we're not very efficient. The process of discovering this hurt. So, to answer your question: yes, it was a particular problem. You can make compromises and you can get things done, and you can get things done very well because people want to do it. They care and they've got talent - they mightn't have ability but they have talent. Australians think talent is everything, or they did in those days, so you have to make a compromise. In the short run it doesn't matter - in the long run you lose credibility.

**J.W.** That's what I was thinking - did you have to draw away from those people eventually?

**K.H.** No no no! On the contrary, they drew away from me - I had lost my credibility - and it's perfectly reasonable. The situation has changed and I am compromised - as I said earlier I am remembered for the compromises I made.

**J.W.** Jean-Charles didn't arrive until 1969. How about the early period, with the relatively inexperienced young performers and composers of the SPPNM?

**K.H.** But also they were bright talents, and I was pleased that Jean-Charles came out to share in these things. On the one hand, you had Barry McKimm's bunch, who were great in their work. They might have seemed to me a little bit - not 'off the planet' but not quite aware of what had been accomplished - as if they'd read the book but not heard the music, which is probably true; but the product was really very enjoyable and it was refreshing, and there it was! This is the whole thing: talent. God, you had 'talent au go-go'. You had young Ian Bonighton, who really was a talent but also as pedantic as hell, writing fake Hindemith fugues, but this is just one side of the story. Given the opportunity to exploit his talent, he became something really interesting. Gerald Lester, Stuart Challender, Graham Abbott, each in their own particular way responded to a gesture - fundamentally it was talent. Who else was there? Anyway, there were many others with a similar degree of talent. The point was to try and give an example which illustrated that: talent is not enough, work a little harder! In a way, each of them did somehow respond to that. It was not exactly an avant garde approach, but I put it forward as a challenge to get them to do things. I was then able to complain that their shortcomings were technical, therefore there was really no excuse for their shortcomings as these had nothing to do with talent. Talent will develop providing that you've got it.

**J.W.** You mentioned your function in relation to that group in a previous conversation - the fact that you had to encourage them, but at the same time repel them from your own ideas - from becoming clones.

**K.H.** Yes, because the temptation was always there to imitate. Even at the Centre de Musique there was exactly the same attitude. If there is a difference between Boulez and I, between the thrust of the Centre de Musique and that of the Domaine Musicale, it's that he projected his own personality, his own aesthetic and his own point of view. I decided that I would never do that, and I didn't do it in France - remember that the Centre de Musique was based on an Australian idea - and I've never done it as far as Australia is concerned. What I believe in, and what is extremely close and pertinent to me in my association with Australian musicians, particularly young musicians, is to give them every opportunity to discover *themselves* and not become an impediment to their progress, or something they could copy. Perhaps it would have been better to have been more positive - certainly, again, there's a cost. I had a model, that great teacher called Arnold Schoenberg, who at no time ever laid upon his students the twelve tone technique or his own aesthetic; and when you think of the composition students that he had - from Eisler and John Cage through to Webern - the results are proof in themselves. So I tried to emulate, if you like, the teaching approach of Arnold Schoenberg.

One must also put into the perspective certain very personal things. There were many in France with the Centre de Musique, through my personal involvement with students; but, one thing that I did not expect when I came back to Australia was to find that same kind of general commitment and enthusiasm to that particular degree. When I came back from France at the beginning of '67 to continue with the position at Melbourne University, on reaching the apartment in St. Kilda, there, standing in the doorway was Stuart Challender and Graham Abbott. Both of them said: "and what are we going to do now?" - that's impressive! Those were the times, yes it was a marvelous time to come back and it was that kind of commitment that made it so.

**J.W.** You mentioned in a 1969 interview with Andrew McIntyre that there was no concept of 'the group' in Australia.

**K.H.** Yes - and I think that was important because, consequently, when we established something like the SPPNM it didn't imply a political entity - it didn't mean that there would be insiders and outsiders or whatever. You've alluded to the fact that, if you look at the musicians who were involved in the SPPNM the complement changes. That's exactly the point, it wasn't like an 'in group' of the same sort of people doing the same sort of thing - it was not a 'them vs. us' situation at any time - it was based on a desire to develop a musical experiment. Look at the music that we played, just look at the programs and I think that will be self explanatory. It was not that those programs were all contemporary music, but they were all played in a 'discovery' kind of way, with a commitment made individually toward a musical event - a 'composition'.

**J.W.** In the very early years, '66 and '67, did you ever introduce a free approach to improvisation - was part

of your interest to get spontaneous improvisational interaction?

**K.H.** There was, for the most part, a reticence and we were able to analyse and discover what that reticence was. People tended to improvise to what they were capable of doing, and there is a particular problem with improvisation. Improvisation demands that you are a very equipped musician so that you can be free to do what you want to do; whereas the improvisation that was often seen with these musicians was improvising within their capacity - they were not free from technical limitations. Therefore the type of improvisation we subsequently developed in Australia, particularly with Jean-Charles, was not just to demonstrate, but to encourage people to discover that if they wanted to fulfil their musical ideas they had to be free from the technical limitations and they had to know and understand lots of music. You had to be 'up with it' otherwise you were limited<sup>12</sup>.

**J.W.** Now the Electronic workshop: you began to set that up shortly after - that must have been a relatively radical step.

**K.H.** It certainly was. The best way that I can explain it is that the Vice Chancellor at Melbourne University in those days had, I gather, a tradition that they would always invite you to afternoon tea when you were first appointed. Anyway, during the course of afternoon tea, the Vice Chancellor said: "I believe you came here to develop an 'electronic studio'" and I said "Yes!". He said: "I've got one at home and they're very good, aren't they?" I realised that what he was talking about and what he was thinking of, was a hi-fi set! I don't think we would even call it a hi-fi set anymore. So it became a battle which was years later repeated at Latrobe: educating people that - no! You didn't want one thousand dollars, but you wanted one hundred and fifty thousand dollars! We eventually achieved that one way or another, but in both cases it wasn't easy and it wasn't achieved overnight. What was important was: by opening the Grainger Museum, one already had a tradition in electronic music to build upon. I could say: "here is the man, now if that has already been accomplished you have to put up" - that was a way of illustrating it.

**J.W.** So the nature of the workshops with electronic music - was it an experimental approach, or was it more a situation of teaching students the fundamentals so they could go ahead and work independently?

**K.H.** No, you didn't have the resources to teach so much - it was experimental, using the material we had on hand. From this point, it was a question of creating the environment, numbers of people and events. So, the electronic workshop, the SPPNM, the educational program with regard to the students in the Faculty, and the Saturday morning children's programs were all ingredients of a pot-pourri: the development of a program of enthusiasm, utilising the available material in a positive and a direct way - instead of taking an academic approach. I am not that sort of person anyway, but even if I had wanted to approach it that way it would not have worked out, be-

cause I did not have the resources. It grew like topsy out of an inevitable event, but I don't think that was a bad thing - it accumulated very quickly.

**J.W.** The children's workshops were also held at the Grainger Museum - I think it was in 1967, your second year there. The aim of those workshops was educational, plus a way of gathering raw sonic material for *musique concrete*. For example, your **Music for Monuments** (1967, for instruments and/or voices and prepared tape).

**K.H.** Yes, well that just became an outlet, if you like, for Music for Monuments. If you think about it, it's one aspect of my 'frozen improvisations' which people call compositions, because it's an accumulation of various types of events, under various sorts of improvised situations that come together to make a 'frozen' piece<sup>13</sup>. I think it's the only example in which things come together in that particular way. But, as I've mentioned previously, I've always looked upon music, or composition as being a *creative process*, as distinct from a *product*. If I have criticism of a lot of the composers today, it's because they make products, and I don't think of composition as being a product. I think of composition as being a process, an exchange of concepts, and an exchange of ideas - you can see we're already talking about improvisation. Improvisation is really composition. A lot of the music I hear today, a lot of so-called compositions, I look at them as 'products' - they're for sale.

**J.W.** There are a lot of problems with the term *experimental* and some composers don't like their work being described as such. Of course every composer experiments, but this term seems to imply to them that they don't really know what they are doing in advance. You don't seem to be disturbed about the use of the word experimental.

**K.H.** If you were to say to me that the term means "I don't know what I am doing", I would argue that this was a prerequisite of composition: if I know what I am doing in advance I am just dealing with a product. It's rather like a cook - I'm not a cook but I can read a recipe, and I'm very good at cooking from recipes, but a cook, or the equivalent as a musician, would be someone who 'throws the book away' - and 'makes up' something. That's what it's about, you know.

**J.W.** Thinking about the early Australian performances in the **Nuniques** series (Monash 1968-70's), and the radical nature of these works overall, it seems fortuitous that you arrived back in Australia at the time or just previous to the time that Australia would go through political, social and cultural foment - really coming to a head in 1968. You made the decision to return after your brief visit in 1964: did you sense things were going to change?

**K.H.** Yes I believed so. Superficially, if I look back on it now, I would say politically and from every point of view - this is only my personal observation - I thought that Gorton was a very fine Prime Minister, and I think that he laid the foundation for the development of the arts. I think that from about '72 on, we have seen a

general betrayal. The point was that I was delighted to be on the scene when the rocket went off. It's true that another political party got the benefit. The particular political party that I was speaking of, and was very much for, and was very much involved in at the time, betrayed the arts and has continued to do so. Not that the other group would be any better now.

I remember because I served on the beginnings of all these things, and I said to them: "You're going to give money and you're going to create mediocrity" - and there had to be mediocrity. You see, art is subversive. But when I came back, and there was Barry McKimm and the others, just the gesture of writing music was subversive. Now music is a commodity! That's what it is - everyone gets paid and so it's a commodity. There's a lot of Muzak! And if you remember what the director of Muzak said when he was selling music, he said: "I'm not selling music, I'm selling a product". And that's the point.

**J.W.** So if you look at the present day and the situation as it is in Melbourne: you have composers who are getting plenty of commissions - established composers - and then on the periphery you have groupings of unestablished people, similar in some ways to the people you were dealing with in 1966 with the SPPNM. How do you view the activities of the people who presently form this fringe? They are doing something similar to what McKimm and the others were doing in 1966, often dealing with the same types of concepts.

**K.H.** Well that's right! I mean we're into the repetitive society, we're into the 'silent' society, we're into music not being music any more. People often say about our society that music has lost its way with the public. Well, I reckon there has probably never been a time in the whole history of music when musicians haven't tried desperately to communicate with the public. I'm thinking about all music now, pop as much as anything else. God alone knows what they are trying to communicate, but everyone's trying to communicate. And what's interesting about it is that there isn't that much difference between those terrible 'pops' that are saying "I love you close the door" and those 'eggheads' at the other end who are systematising themselves out of their gourds.

What is really involved? What is involved is self-aggrandisement! What is involved is: "look I'm a composer". This is the term that doesn't sound so bad in French, but which I am embarrassed about in English. Composer - a 'poser' - that's the point, pretending to be a creator! And so all of this activity is irrelevant, it's just a question of: "We will have these events, we will do these things", and there will be silence, and people won't do anything! And people won't rock the boat, and people will just shut up, and we'll have art, and we'll be neutered, and so it's soul destroying, and there it is. That's what's happened<sup>14</sup>.

At the moment you haven't got the environment. Maybe we'll get the environment by stimulating it, but you're not going to get the environment by any of these other means, because it's got nothing to do with music making. You're not going to get a good piece of music out of that stuff. It's not possible because it's

repetitive. As you know with pop songs, they're not even concerned with making popular tunes any more, they're concerned about standing up there and stating: "look, I'm a Pop Star". There's no musical content and there's no gesture towards what music has been since the beginning of time: subversive. This is not subversive music. Even when they stand up there and yell obscenities it's not subversive anymore. The violence of today is created because music is 'silent' - if music was 'noisy' there wouldn't be violence - think about it!

Yes, the period when we started off the SPPNM with Barry McKimm and the others was great and all that has happened is that this type of music has lost its radicalism by repetition.

#### Footnotes

1. Werder, F. "Humble, The Complete Musician" *the Age* 22.10.1968
  2. For more detailed biography see Laughton Harris: "Keith Humble" in Callaway & Tunley (eds), **Australian Composition in the Twentieth Century** OUP Melbourne 1978. See also James Murdoch (ed), "Keith Humble" in **Australia's Contemporary Composers** Macmillan, Melbourne 1972
  3. From the transcription of a 1988 interview with Robert Rooney.
  4. Rawlins, A. "As Modern as Debussy Darling!" in *Lot's Wife* 27.7.65, p17
  5. From the transcription of a 1988 interview with Robert Rooney.
  6. Murdoch op.cit p123
  7. Murdoch p123-4
  8. Humble's use of the terms 'music repetition' and 'economics of music' relate directly to an (untaped) discussion we had just concluded regarding the book **Noise** by political economist, Jacques Attali. Humble believes that Attali articulates many of his own long held views on the relationship between economics and music. See: Jacques Attali, **Noise: The Political Economy of Music**, Theory and History of Literature vol16, Manchester University Press, Manchester 1985 (transl)
  9. Murdoch op.cit p124
  10. Harris op. cit p117
  11. For further discussion of some of these views see Andrew McIntyre, "An Interview with Keith Humble" *Lot's Wife* 1.10.68. p18
  12. For further discussion of the SPPNM see Murdoch, op.cit p125
  13. The comments regarding 'frozen improvisation' were made in the context of various discussions we have had regarding the relationship of improvisation to composition.
  14. This part of the interview also has to be seen in the context of the above mentioned discussion of Jacques Attali's **Noise**. One part of Attali's thesis which Humble agrees with is that music produced as a commodity for repeated use has no power to subvert. Repetition supports political oppression (political 'silence'), and only music making which is detached from the economic system and arrives unheralded, such as 'exploratory' music, can subvert and create change (political 'noise').
- Note.** For various reasons this interview contains some omissions and small alterations. These were indicated but later removed, with Keith Humble's permission.

# FLEDERMAN: A retrospective assessment from a biased point of view.

*Simone de Haan*

Flederman was formed in 1979 after numerous discussions between composer/performer Carl Vine and myself regarding the possibility of establishing a duo which would bring a new energy and approach to the contemporary music scene at the time. The Australia Contemporary Music Ensemble (ACME) in Melbourne had recently disbanded and the Seymour Group in Sydney had just established its position as Sydney's mainstream contemporary ensemble.

Carl and I both felt that it was necessary to establish a group which would challenge the accepted norms in the presentation of new music and, in doing so, present concerts which would engage audiences in a more dynamic way. Our collaboration began when I commissioned a work for trombone and live electronics from Carl. Although that particular work was never written, we did use live analogue electronics in performances which combined improvisation, music theatre, commissioned Australian works and standard contemporary repertoire. An ongoing collaboration was maintained in the period 1979-83, during which Flederman established its place as Australia's leading contemporary chamber group.

The first year's program was particularly ambitious and involved touring the entire East Coast of Australia with a mound of electronics and instruments. All of the costs were met by us and we were also responsible for every aspect of the concert from publicity and setting the lights for the concert, to standing at the door taking tickets. We made a loss in the first year of operation and in the second year received an initial grant of \$5,000 from the Australia Council. The first series of concerts included improvised works for trombone and live electronics, John Cage's **Song Books**, the Opera **Irma** by Gavin Briers, **Sequenza V** by Luciano Berio and new works by Graham Hair, Warren Burt, Carl Vine, Elena Kats and other Australian composers. Throughout Flederman's initial period as a duo and as Ensemble in Residence at the Queensland Conservatorium of Music in 1980, our starting point was improvisation and developing our own music in combination with the commissioning of new works. Another important facet of the group's work was the development of simple music theatre models. This called on us to move away from a purely instrumental perspective, and create a more integrated and expansive performance context, which we hoped would challenge the audience.

It was imperative for us that the performer should have a greater role in the creative process, and that a direction be found where composition and performance could co-exist within the same environment. Our position contrasted with Larry Sitsky's assertion that the difference between composition and performance is that "One is creative, the other re-creative..."<sup>1</sup>. This implies a hierarchical situation in which creativity rests solely with the composer, the performer's role being that of re-creating the composer's intentions.

It is true that this is an important aspect of the relationship, but the performer has considerably more to offer than this. Greg Schiemer makes the following point when looking at this issue: "If you haven't performers who are prepared to say what they think of something or are prepared to insist on their position as a performer, then you won't change much..."<sup>2</sup> Keith Humble takes this point even further: "What is essential, is that it is creative on both levels and each brings a searching mind to how one is going to freeze these moments into an experience."<sup>3</sup>

In 1981, percussionist Graham Leak joined the group and Flederman became the official ensemble in residence at the Queensland Conservatorium of Music. This enabled the group to work intensively, with regular daily rehearsal periods scheduled and a concentration on improvisation and work in progress.

After an extended period of working in this way, and the subsequent analysis of results, it was felt that Flederman as it was then constituted, was not suited to developing an improvisatory way of working. At about the same time, Flederman was adding new members - Geoffrey Collins (flute), Christian Wojtowicz (cello) and Graham Hair (composer/piano) - forming a sextet which would perform the standard contemporary repertoire with an emphasis on Australian music.

As the group expanded, it was no longer possible to work in an intensive way. The individual members lived in four separate States and only came together in concentrated work periods before concerts. This meant that any developmental work was impossible, as the physical distances and the way in which the group was changing totally excluded it.

Steven Howe describes a situation which classically trained musicians often face: "If they've had a classical training they usually can't improvise...because they can't see into it, you know, how simple it really is."<sup>4</sup> In many respects the decision not to con-

tinue with improvisation and work in progress was premature. The work had not reached a mature stage of development and there were a number of possibilities which had not been explored. With improvised or exploratory music, as in any interactive situation, it's essential to acknowledge the *process* as a primary component. We made a hasty decision about the quality and success of this preliminary work and applied conventional evaluative methods used in 'classical' traditions, to work which was still in progress and had not yet evolved sufficiently for us to make assumptions about its nature or worth. In many ways by taking this stand, we supported the movement away from the performer as a creative component in the music making process, and put ourselves entirely in the hands of the composer. As Flederman was a relatively new ensemble and had no substantial repertoire from which to draw, it meant that we were totally dependant on Australian composers to provide works of quality within an extremely limited time span.

I tend to agree with Thurston Dart: "Extemporisation of one kind and another played a very large part in early music, but during the last two centuries or so, it has increasingly fallen out of fashion. It is probably no mere co-incidence that musical notation during the same period has enmeshed the performer in an ever closing net of precise and tyrannical directions."<sup>5</sup> Given that improvisation and work in progress were no longer primary concerns, it is interesting that arguably the most successful and workable compositions (including *Miniature 3* by Carl Vine and *Ganymede/Prometheus* by Graham Hair, written for Flederman from 1979 to 1983) were written by members of the group. This was largely due to the fact that they were excellent performers and therefore had an awareness of performance problems in addition to being in constant dialogue with the other musicians. In their case it was not just a question of providing a score for Flederman to perform, but refining over a period of days or weeks a work which was suited to the individual characteristics of the group and the performance styles of the various players. Graham Hair perceptively states of his own music: "In general, I think it has probably become more and more a kind of balance of certain physical qualities. That is to say, whether an instrument blows or scrapes or bangs..."<sup>6</sup> Obviously, working with the performers in an extremely direct and virtually 'physical' way has influenced the nature of his music.

Flederman's policy to concentrate solely on notated music resulted in a total dependence on commissions. Programs were often changed at the last minute because works were not completed on time. This also resulted in works being programmed irrespective of quality and suitability, as many of the commissioned works were being performed for the first time. Although one of the group's stated aims was to develop and encourage collaboration with Australian composers, this rarely eventuated in any meaningful way. Because of the contracted and extremely intensive nature of rehearsal schedules, a sense of dialogue never eventuated. In fact the first the group usually saw of a new score was at the rehearsal period a few days before the concert.

As the ensemble had an unorthodox core instrumentation of flute, cello, trombone, percussion and two keyboards, composers seemed to have great difficulty in writing for the particular requirements of the ensemble. This did not encourage dialogue either, indeed it initiated the opposite, eventually resulting in the composition of a number of works which did not consider the unusual nature of the group in any respect. The composers did not account for or consider the inherent strengths and weaknesses of such a combination, and instead took the simple option of writing for Flederman in a standard way. In the main, composers made few attempts to speak directly with the performers and develop ways of writing for our combination.

The problems that eventually stifled the creative potential of Flederman are not uncommon, and have been articulated by a number of contemporary authors. Thurston Dart again: "This progressive annihilation of the performer's share in the creation of the music is an alarming phenomenon and one that has never occurred before in the whole history of music, European and non European."<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting that although obvious problems existed in the composer/performer relationship, a new mode of working was not explored. By 1982 Flederman had become totally dependent on composers for material, and this resulted in few concerts involving improvised forms, and far less creative opportunities for individual performers. Although the group was still concerned with the fundamental issues of interaction, contact and exploration, improvisation and greater responsibility for the music on the part of the performers was no longer considered a part of its creative development. Flederman had virtually abandoned all responsibility for the creation of its own music.

At this point I sensed a need for change, but did not have sufficient clarity of direction or concrete ideas to initiate it given the extremely conservative position to which the group had now moved. There was not sufficient clarification of the working process, which was manifested in an increasing degree of alienation between the performer and the composer. It became the norm that composers would write pieces of chamber music, rather than works specifically designed for the individual skills in Flederman. During my period with the ensemble I sensed less interaction with composers, and more concentration on commissioning of works and performing them to virtuoso standard. In many respects Flederman was now purely a vehicle for Australian composers. The primary concern was no longer that of composer/performer dialogue, but independent composer and performer promotion. The situation eventually became untenable and at the end of 1983 I felt there was no longer a point in pursuing this particular musical direction.

On deciding to move in a new creative direction, I resigned from my teaching position at the Canberra School of Music in order to travel to Holland and work there. (Holland has a reputation for being one of the more innovative musical situations, and I had been advised through various sources that there was a strong movement towards integrating composed and



improvised musics within the one performance context).

A number of the world's foremost improvisers including Derek Bailey, George Lewis, Steve Lacy, Evan Parker and David Moss performed regularly in Amsterdam. A major part of this environment also included the Dutch groups which combined improvised and composed musics within the one context. These included the Guus Janssen Septet and the Maarten Altena Octet with which I performed. In many cases these musicians performed intricately constructed works which were totally improvised, and on other occasions combined composed elements and placed them between or as a subtext to the improvised areas. This gave me further insight and a totally different perspective to that which I had experienced in Australia.

The method of working was quite different to that of Flederman. Rather than any fixed repertoire the music was constantly changing; moving between areas of improvisation and notated sections. The performance presentation was more casual and the personnel within the groups were often changed for the purpose of retaining spontaneity and interaction. In these groups no distinction was made between notated and improvised musics, and there was a feeling of *collage* and constantly evolving dialogue. The notated sections were usually written by the leader of the particular group, but there were many left free for improvisation. Members of the group were also encouraged to contribute their own material. Through performing with the Maarten Altena Octet it became apparent that integration was possible and that there were concrete ways in which to link seemingly disparate areas within the same performance context.

Anthony Pay, the distinguished clarinettist formerly with the London Sinfonietta makes the following observation about this kind of work: "It is true that people who are good at improvisation need not necessarily be good at realising what a composer actually intends in a precisely notated work, and the difficulty arises when you have to mix these two things..."<sup>8</sup> "The difference as far as I am concerned, is that one is unknown poetry in which I can progress. In playing written music I'm not actually progressing, I'm just learning to do better what I already do..."<sup>9</sup> Working with the Maarten Altena Octet for the first time, I was able to observe that: "The unique experience for the composer, in the use of improvisation must be the relinquishing of control over at least some of the music, and even more critically for the composer, passing over control not to chance but to other musicians."<sup>10</sup>

On returning to Australia my main aim was to establish a new project which would attempt to work in a unified way and, as part of this work, to break down existing barriers between the composer and performer here. This resulted in the formation of *Pipeline*, which is concerned with developing a relationship in which both performers and composers are active partners in the creative process. There is a challenge in this way of working: "If you can understand what it means to be disciplined and to be accurate, committed and involved with something which is purely notated and also be capable of being free, being able to step outside the inhibition that

notation produces, and do something which is your own and relevant, then I think that is probably the highest form of instrumental talent there is. And it is only really great instrumentalists who can do that, who are free of their instrument to that extent."<sup>11</sup>

Obviously in jazz and work since the early fifties by Cage, Stockhausen, Brown, Wolff, Feldman, Cardew and others, there have already been considerable moves to integrate composition and performance. In Australia however, they have remained for the most part two discrete areas in both musical and sociological terms, and have rarely been viewed as equal components in a larger musical process. We have now reached a stage where it is crucial to set up a new mode of working. It is therefore extremely important that the artificial borders between composition and performance are eliminated so that they may then work as part of an integrated whole. "The composer is no longer a creator, but a participant in an action that includes several human responses. An art work is not a fixed entity repeated endlessly, but an organism which changes and is reshaped with every new contact..."<sup>12</sup> "The performer in such works must be imaginative and resourceful enough not only to fulfill the technical details, but also rise to the level of co-creator."<sup>13</sup>

On reflection I consider the experience of working with Flederman a valuable one, and a step towards evolving a personal and distinctive musical direction. In addition the group made a significant contribution in the support of Australian composers' work, and the international performance standards which have set a bench mark for similar groups. My main criticism however is with the working process which evolved, and in the end, the lack of development of a group language or musical identity.

Through my experience in Holland, a series of interviews with Australian composer/performers and my current work with Pipeline, I am gradually clarifying a number of aspects in the creative musical process as a means of establishing more viable ways of working in the future. The Pipeline Contemporary Music Project was established to address these problems though a number still seem far from resolution. Yet there is an increasing recognition of the difficulties and a new approach emerging among Australian composers and performers. It may soon be possible to achieve a more relevant relationship between them.

#### Footnotes

1. de Haan, S. Interviews for Masters Thesis (in progress) University of W.A. 1986

2. *ibid*

3. *ibid*

4. Bailey, D. **Improvisation: its Nature and Practice in Music** Moorland Publishing 1980

5. Dart, T. **The Interpretation of Music** Hutchinson University Library London 1954. Fourth edition 1967

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7. Dart op.cit

8. Bailey op. cit

9. *ibid*

10. *ibid*

11. Bailey op.cit

12. Wittlich, G.E. (ed) **Aspects of Twentieth Century Music** Prentice Hall 1975

13. *ibid*

# Towards a living tradition

Greg Schiemer

When David Hirst's review of computer music in Australia<sup>1</sup> did not include any reference to my work in this area, I first realised that I must say something if the facts are to become known<sup>2</sup>. Any account of what I have done over the past nineteen years would be incomplete without an account of the work of three others - David Ahern, Phillipa Cullen and Phil Connor - who have each made their own contribution in some area of new music in Australia.

## David Ahern and the spirit of AZ

Many young composers get in the spotlight well before they have developed any sense of their own cultural identity, and David Ahern was no exception. Few of them are as direct when it comes to shaking off the colonising mentality which still dominates Australian music today. My first contact with David Ahern came after I began studying at Sydney University in 1969, when Peter Sculthorpe recommended David's 'Ear Cleaning' sessions to his students. David had just returned from study with Stockhausen, to confront a musical establishment largely dominated by Nineteenth Century English cultural values.

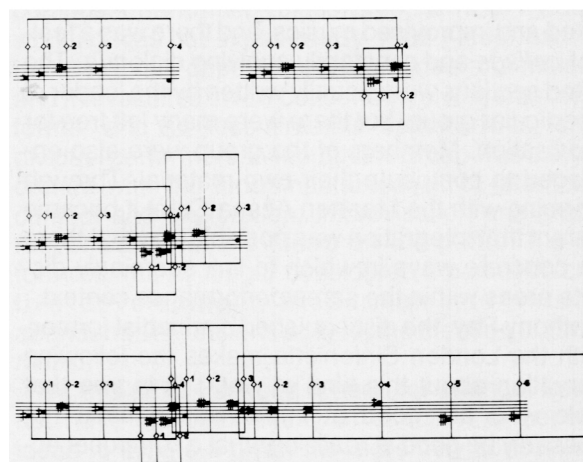
David had organised AZ Music to introduce avant-garde musical ideas into Australia. Within it there was a core group of improvisers calling itself *Teletopa*, and the larger group which was known as the *Sunday Ensemble*. Through AZ's members<sup>3</sup> experimental music was introduced onto the Sydney contemporary music scene, then dominated by the International Society for New Music.

Guided by the late Professor Peart, the ISCM saw its role as the patron of the second wave of young Australian Composers - those who were expected to walk in the footsteps of Meale, Sculthorpe, Butterley, Sitsky, Banks, Humble and Werder. Its agenda was safe, including composers like Messiaen, Ligeti, Pousseur, Lutoslawski, Penderecki, Maxwell-Davies, Birtwistle, Bedford and Mellers, and very rarely Stockhausen, Xenakis or even Boulez. With English composers somewhat over-represented, this music was upheld as the standard, presumably for the enlightenment of the new generation here<sup>4</sup>.

David Ahern, through AZ music, offered the first real challenge to this sort of cultural filtering by introducing the radical music of the North American avant-garde - the music of people like Cage, Feldman, Wolff, Young, Ashley, Mumma, Lucier, Rzewski. Unlike the McKimm, Clayton and Rooney Trio in Melbourne a few years prior, David could not be dismissed as someone from the visual arts diverging into music. He was a young composer chosen by the establishment, which had already acknowledged him through patronage of his orchestral works **After Mallarmé** and **Ned Kelly Music**. Paradoxically, David challenged this establishment by championing the music of another English composer - Cornelius Car-

dew. There is wonderful irony in the fact that Cardew's music, brought to this country by AZ, represented a living extension of something that is unique in the English tradition: the creation of a music for the masses - the amateur choirs, the colliery brass bands, the change-ringers. What the English establishment had been giving us was not quite the genuine article, but academic musical standards articulating a system of middle class values and maintaining the cultural cringe.

While it is true that AZ would invariably perform most of the Paragraphs of **The Great Learning** within eighteen months of their English premiere, it was the Cardew aesthetic of an egalitarian music - music composed for large numbers of non-specialist



A page from the score of *Phyla* for 3 instruments, 1972.

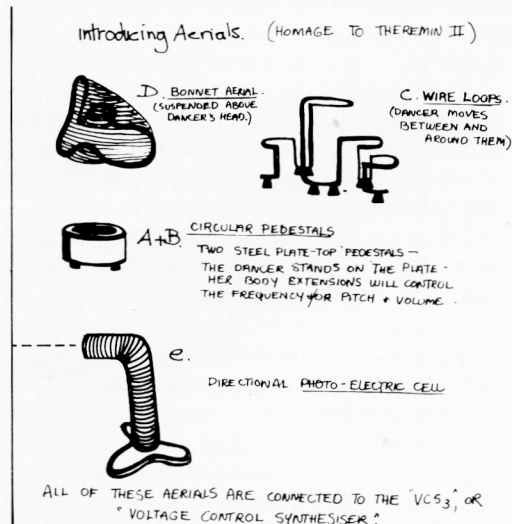
musicians - that was the greatest single influence on its members. The same zeal which motivated the Scratch Orchestra was there in AZ, and it continued for several years after the demise of the Scratch Orchestra.

AZ ideas encompassed not just the work of Cardew but also the American composers associated with the Fluxus movement, who offered little or no rationalisation of their musical aesthetic. American compositional thought involving semantics and linguistics (Brun's or Gaburo's, for example) had no place in AZ, whose musical mission seemed to lie in making an assault on mediocrity without explanation. To that end music which polarised the concert-going public became the focus of AZ's activities. AZ experimental music ideals were articulated by actions and not by words, or to paraphrase Cage by "...not saying something, but rather, doing something".

## Boit

During my involvement with AZ Music I wrote a series of pieces called **Boit** where each piece is made from a single sound. The first of these was written in September 1970. **Boit**, often mispronounced to sound

like the French word for 'box', is in fact just a vocal sound made in imitation of a drop of water landing in water. I made recordings of water in an anechoic chamber at the Architecture Faculty at Sydney University. At first **Boit** was to be a tape piece, but it seemed to me more interesting to create a simple process that would allow a group of people to take part in it. All of the pieces except the last required



Cover of the program to 'age to Theremin No.2 indicating the various types of aerials used.

non-visual co-ordination between the players, who performed in the dark. The pieces used cues either transmitted by touch in the darkness - through hands alone, through thin strings interconnecting one player to another, through feet feeling a score consisting of lines taped on the floor - or through retina after-images produced by a camera flash fired into the faces of the performers. Changes in light intensity of the foreground and background image produced by such a flash - a deliberately subjective form of visual stimulus - provided the cues for the last piece. The nature of the pieces always meant that only the performer could monitor the fidelity of the performance. The last two pieces were performed simultaneously at an AZ concert on 20th July 1972.

The pieces sought to provide musical structure without visual means of communication, eliminating the need for a written score to aid memory in performance. With a score reduced to a few verbal directives that are easy to memorise, absolute control over the memory of those taking part is relinquished. The performers thereby contribute more than simply being the vehicle for a composer's directives; they actually have control of the larger shape, and not just the details of the piece. Reaction from the audience - which always becomes uninhibited in the darkness - added a theatrical component to every performance.

These were the first pieces I did that were tinted with my AZ experience, and as the starting point for my other work, they owe something to David Ahern. I guess most of the group, like me, found it difficult to work with David beyond a certain point, making it difficult to communicate any sense of our indebtedness to him. Understanding improvisation as a form of real-time composing, the use of electronics in music, the concept of music as a process rather than music as

a product, are all facets of my musical experience which would never have been except for him.

### The origin of Phillipa Cullen's Electronic Dance Interface

One of the people I frequently met while participating in AZ Music was Phillipa Cullen. I first met her while working on the music for two Yeats plays produced by Peter Gray at Sydney University in 1969. We were both studying Fine Arts at Sydney University in that year, when Dr. Donald Brook and Bert Flugelman set up the Fine Arts workshop in what is still known as the Tin Sheds. Here two electronics engineering students, Jim MacDonald and David Smith, constructed some transistorised Theremins based on designs which appeared in *Electronics Australia* magazine in the same year. We saw them demonstrated in one of Donald Brook's lectures - not as musical instruments but as an *idea* that might be investigated further by someone with an open mind, who could explore ways of using it. Phillipa took up the challenge and rehearsed with two other dancers<sup>5</sup> for several months before finally entering the work she had created - **Homage to Theremin** - in the Sydney Choreographic competition in 1970.

The sound was raw Theremin, with pitch and volume controlled by the dancers. The Theremin Antennae were two large intersecting triangles made from lengths of stretched copper clothes line. Phillipa had no preconceptions about the organisation of the sounds. She understood that the relationship between music and dance could somehow be different because of the instrument. Not so the adjudicators of the competition. As I recall, the timing of the ensemble was commended: "Spot on! Phillipa, Spot on!... but next time choose a better piece of music."

In 1971, Phillipa found a book on Laban Notation for dance movement. She approached Professor Bennett at Basser Computing Centre in Sydney University with an enquiry about using a computer to assist in the exploration of human movement. She was introduced to Dr. Don Herbison-Evans, who had some previous experience programming graphic dis-



Phillipa Cullen in 'age to Theremin, 1972

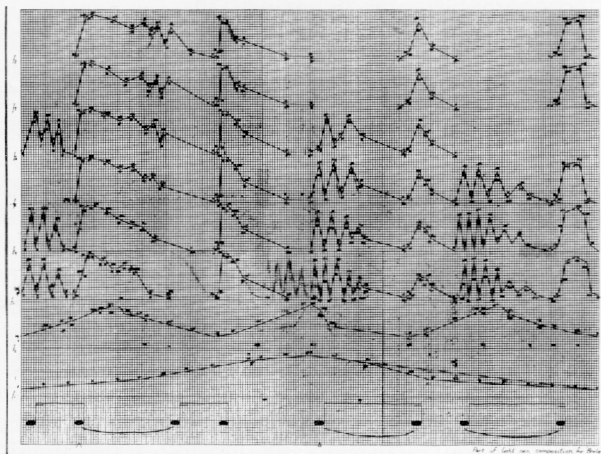
plays of human figures. She, according to Dr. Herbison-Evans, provided the trigger for the Computer Choreographic research which he has pursued to this day.

### Phillipa's Dance Ensemble 1972

Phillipa's next project, realised in 1972, was called 'age to Theremin No 2. Phillipa invited me to col-



laborate, as she had done in the first event, and this time I was able to accept. She was working with a platform antenna design that had been devised by David Moore, and a number of simple but rather elegant tubular antennae. One of these had a parabolic shape resembling a manta ray suspended over the dance floor, the other a series of counter-balanced semicircles which formed a sort of free-standing enclosure in which a dancer moved. The person responsible for constructing these was an architect named Manuel Nobleza. Another engineering student, Phil Connor was directly involved in making Theremins which could be tuned more easily, and which had frequency to voltage converters allowing them to interface to the recently acquired VCS3 synthesisers at Sydney University Music Department. These allowed control voltages to be applied to any program patch of the VCS3, enabling the dance movement to affect not only pitch and dynamics, but timbre and duration. Each antenna was deployed at various stages of the work as Phil Connor and I performed a series of manually sequenced patches which, for example, faded out one patch to make way for the next patch, or disconnected Theremin 4 to



*Reduction of the hand drawn graph of harmonic profiles for Brolga (1972).*

Synthesiser 1 before connecting Theremin 3. In addition to the Theremin, a light beam with an LDR (Light Dependent Resistor) was used to provide a trigger for the synthesiser. Each person collaborating in the project accepted the need not to impose music or dance results that did not arise as a by product of the collaboration. Dance mannerism and musical fashion was avoided through a strictly maintained principle that all sound should be made as a by product of human movement. The performance duration was about 45 minutes. The dancers were Philippa, Jacqui Carroll, Maggie Knightley and Peter Dickson.

After Philippa's 1972 Theremin performance, I had used the Theremin in teaching high school students. Encouraged by Phil Connor, I tried to construct one and learnt electronics as a result of this process. My musical aesthetic from this time onwards changed as I began to recognise that the Technician's work was not just creative - in the sense that it involves the work of human hands - it had the potential to undo the cultural inbreeding that happens when the distinguished

composer - the 'master of novices' - transmits the tradition to his charges. I also began to see that it was not so much the composer, but the instrument designer who had a more fundamental impact on the Western musical tradition.

### **From Boit to Brolga**

During 1971 and 1972, I had started planning a piece in the **Boit** series where the response of the system took the form of a program for a machine rather than just a set of instructions given verbally to and remembered by a group of vocalists. This piece required two vocalists to perform into a microphone, whereby the machine would produce a chain reaction consisting of the same sounds, transposed, repeated in different rhythms, timbrally altered and relocated in space.

It seemed to me at that time that computers could at most be a tool for advanced conceptualisation about music, but never sophisticated enough to generate the actual sounds of a piece during a performance. My predicament was not helped by the fact that those who had technical understanding of computers were sceptics when it came to accepting a music which after all only consisted of people imitating drips! In 1972, when Bernard Rands visited Australia, he encouraged me, telling me of similar paths being followed by Emmanuel Ghent and Salvatore Martirano. I have subsequently found no similarity at all.

Eventually in 1973, I was awarded a C.A.A.C. (Commonwealth Assistance to Australian Composers) Fellowship of \$5000 to spend twelve months on this project, even though at the time of the submission there were many practical details which I was unable to specify.

Peter Evans - a core member of Teletopa, and a programmer by profession - showed a lot of interest in this project on his return to Australia. We talked lucidly about the ideas of the piece, including the distinction between Clock Time and Servo-time<sup>6</sup>.

After spending many hours in early 1973 modelling the idea as a Fortran program we eventually concluded that the idea could be realised more simply by building analogue hardware. What followed was my first attempt to build electronic hardware - part of which was a Time to Voltage Converter, ie. a sub-audio Frequency to Voltage Converter. Eventually, when I discovered that the sound had to be processed electro-mechanically using tape and multiple play-back heads, the original target of the entire project was replaced with a more readily achievable one.

The immediate result of the C.A.A.C. Fellowship was a piece done in collaboration with Phil Connor, realised at the Speech Research Centre at Macquarie University where Phil was now employed. Through an introduction made by John Crocker, Ruth Galene, choreographer and founding director of New Dance Theatre, invited Phil and I to produce electronic music for a ballet entitled **Brolga**. Phil had built a harmonic synthesiser in 1971. For **Brolga** he then linked this to the Alpha-16 Mini Computer used to control the Speech Synthesiser at the Centre. Phil had always liked the idea of a light pen being used for writing music. The input device for the Speech Synthesiser was a light pen, and this was also one

level at which the sound for **Brolga** was programmed. Profiles were drawn for the amplitude of seven harmonics, and one for the pitch of the fundamental. Though there were eight controls, the synthesiser was only monophonic. The system was a hybrid computer, meaning that the sound was produced by analogue circuitry controlled digitally. Phil wrote software which allowed parts of the hand-drawn profiles to be selectively played and repeated, and built extra interface hardware. There was no time to properly debug the software - one typing mistake would crash the system, which then had to be reloaded via Teletype paper-tape reader as there was no floppy disk or cassette interface - yet I managed to enter all the code to sequence five large sections of the piece. All the hardware, software and music production for the piece was done in about nine weeks, working twelve or more hours a day, six and sometimes seven days at a time. A voice-over was then edited into parts of the piece, which was then about ten minutes long. It has been used many times by the dance company as part of its dance-in-education program from 1973 and 1975.

During the preparation for **Brolga**, I met Tony Furse who was commencing work on a new digital synthesiser, which later became the *Fairlight*. I recall Phil and Tony Furse exchanging some of their ideas; Phil arguing the need for the light pen in preference to a keyboard and Tony extolling the virtues of a completely digital machine.

For me, **Brolga** represented a step away from the AZ movement, into less charted territory. I really felt a conflict between the informality of the music I had been so involved in and the simplistic rigidity that I had to accept to compose a computer generated accompaniment to a narrative dance. My vision of a computer music that would interact somehow with the person seemed very remote. I turned to other things; **Iconophony**, a short piano piece was written about this time, and I also played the banjo frequently in a church, as well as organising a vernacular liturgy for which I wrote a Cardew-inspired **Mass of the Spirit** for voices, bells and drums. And I worked for a short time as a Burglar Alarm Technician, hoping to learn something about Ultra-sound detection for when Phillipa returned.

Two other pieces were done on the Harmonic Synthesiser. In 1974, a sound track for a computer-animated film called **Butterfly** created by Gillian Hadley on a PDP-8I program written by Doug Richardson. It did not resolve the problems which I had experienced in the **Brolga** piece. While I had a better understanding of the fundamentals of electronics, there seemed to be a basic conflict between the digital computer and my musical aspirations.

The second piece for the Harmonic Synthesiser was **A Rain Poem**, the *Australia '75* project (described later in this article).

### Phillipa Cullen from 1974 to 1975

When Phillipa left Australia shortly after the 'age to Theremin' performance, she studied at the Institute of Sonology in Utrecht, where she further investigated a range of subjects from computer music and biofeedback to interactive movement-controlled

sound performance. The first pressure-sensitive floors were devised around this time<sup>7</sup>. She also studied with Otto Laske and Barry Truax, and with Pauline de Groot; she took part with Teletopa, and the Scratch Orchestra in the ICES festival in London in 1972, where she made contact with Gordon Mumma, David Tudor, David Johnson, John Lanchbury, Johannes Fritsch and Rolf Gehlhaar; she assisted in preparatory work on Stockhausen's **Inori**; she studied Ewe dance and worked with the Ghana dance ensemble; she studied Bharat Natyam under Rukmini Devi at the Kalakshetra; she spent a short period in Nepal studying Folk dance and drumming, and finally went to live and work at Auroville, south of Pondicherry in Tamil Nadu, India.

Returning to Australia in April 1974, she organised seminars and workshops on a wide range of subjects related to her experience of dance, working with relentless energy. One such seminar was held at Central Street Gallery, and ran for eleven days straight. She managed to involve people ranging from Phil Treloar in a realisation of Stockhausen's **Plus-Minus** together with her; members of Bush Video (Mick Glasheen, Steven Jones, Ariel) using home-made Alpha-phones; a Doctor from Prince Henry Hospital Spastic Research Unit using bio-feedback for the control of muscular spasms in spastic children; Jacqui Carroll, Christine Dunne and Phillipa, performing work done in 1972 under the direction of Pauline de Groot in Holland; improvisation between Roger Frampton and Phillipa; Phil Connor and myself with our Theremin developments including the Peak Detection system for deriving the velocity of human movement from position. This was the basis of my work entitled **Body Sonata** which was first performed by Phillipa and Christine Dunne in this programme.

About this time, while she worked with Dr. Don Herbison-Evans who had embarked on computer choreography experiments at the Basser Computer Centre, she also danced with members of the newly formed Aboriginal and Islander Dance group, as well as with The White Company, The Renaissance Players (with Winsome Evans and Professor Frederick May), and with Iwan Natapradja, a Wayang puppeteer, dancer and musician, and founder of the Sydney University Gamelan.

Phillipa's interest in non-Western culture was not eclectic in any superficial way; she had no tourist fantasies, but an ideal of world music and dance that went deep to find the common link between various cultures. Similarly, for her there was no dividing line between a person creating electronic circuits and a person who embodied ideas in movement or sound.

### The Final Dance Technology project

At the invitation of Doug Richardson, Phillipa, Phil Connor and myself became involved in what was our final collaboration, at the Festival of Computer Arts and Sciences called *Australia '75*, held in Canberra in April of that year<sup>8</sup>.

We decided that there were actually two separate projects involving movement-controlled sound: one with a bias towards the dance component; the other based around the Alpha 16 Mini-computer system that Phil Connor and I had put together, where the

bias was towards the sound component. For the former, Arthur Spring, an organ builder, designed and built the pressure sensitive floors referred to above. For the latter, while Phil made additions to his harmonic synthesiser I was constructing new peak-detectors. At the same time Arthur Spring and I modified Phil's original design to make it usable with the platform antennae used in the 1972 project. This enabled the device to be triggered by a standing dancer using movements as fine as flexing a finger, or one dancer making considerably larger movements at some distance from another dancer standing on the antenna. While I actually carried out the work for these circuit modifications, it would have been impossible to do this without the guidance of Arthur Spring who taught me so much about practical analogue electronics in the process.

The dancers for both projects included Phillipa, Helen Herbertson, Brian Coughran, and Wayne Nicholls. The performance interface while it met with Phillipa's approval, was deployed in a way that probably did not use its full potential. In retrospect, my piece **A Rain Poem** for two dancers, using Theremins, F/V converters, Peak Detectors and the Digitally controlled harmonic synthesiser was more an imposition of music on to the system rather than a work arising out of a personal investigation of a system's capabilities. The ideas that came out of work leading up to that event were probably more interesting than the piece itself.

I recall here some of the ideas Phillipa and I had discussed at the time. In the same way that Voltage Control Synthesisers allow a musician to think about sound in terms of its parameters: Pitch, Amplitude, Timbre and Duration - we considered a possible device that could produce electrical analogues of the Laban parameters of movement - Time, Weight, Space and Flow - which would allow that particular aspect of a movement to control an electronically produced sound directly. According to Phillipa, the Theremin, used with the platform antenna was a perfect representation of the way a dancer thinks about Space ie. centred about a single body line in a polaroid field rather than as a series of Cartesian co-ordinates used by engineers to define three dimensional space<sup>9</sup>.

I remember Phillipa also suggesting that under the right conditions the pressure sensitive floors and the velocity signal produced by the Peak Detectors could be a good analogue of Laban's parameter of Weight, with the Acceleration signal perhaps being an analogue of the Laban parameter of Flow<sup>10</sup>.

In characteristic fashion, she also made an extraordinary claim that a dancer actually changes body weight in performing light movements or heavy movements. Out of context, quotations taken from her memoirs don't do justice to the gift she possessed of giving physical expression to her ideas, and she was at her most eloquent in the activity by which she shared her ideas. One can only wonder what might have happened had it not been for her untimely death in June 1975, after she had returned to India. The activity and idealism she compressed into less than six years embraced more than most artists would ever contemplate in sixty.

## Phil Connor: A Postlude

Phil took up the challenge of Tony Furse in 1975 to go on and build a fully digital machine. The new synthesiser, called the *Harmoniac* was in every sense of the term a Digital Signal Processor. With multiple-bus Harvard architecture, and enhanced arithmetic capability (16 x 16 bit multiply in 150nS), it was designed for Linear Prediction Algorithms used in Speech synthesis though Phil had music in mind as well. Its construction was well under way before John Snell's article appeared in the *Computer Music Journal*<sup>11</sup>. Completed in 1981, it and others like it were the fore-runners of today's high speed DSP chips, in which designs like the *Harmoniac* processor are integrated in a single chip<sup>12</sup>.

## The Ashes of Sydney

Jacqui Carroll and I had both collaborated with Phillipa in the **'age to Theremin** project, although we had each collaborated with her in a number of separate projects. Jacqui and I were both sceptical about the reactionary aesthetic of Music Theatre brought here by the Fires of London, and fostered by groups such as the Seymour Group, as a response to AZ Music. It seemed that if a Soprano wore costume, was followed by a pin-spot and accompanied by musicians who fidget on stage, bingo! Music Theatre! So much for the notion of Music Theatre where the theatrical component is a natural by product of a musical process.

In 1976, Jacqui and I arranged to have a concert, because among other things we wanted to continue work done with Phillipa. The group was named *The Ashes of Sydney* as a form of mock deference to the British establishment. At the same time, I wanted to pursue a musical path which was free of the direction which AZ Music had now taken - a veneer of concert professionalism in order to gain public acceptance. No Australia Council funds were sought; musicians would be funded by me and dancers received part of the box office takings, by arrangement with Jacqui.

The concert took place on the 19th September 1976. **Laotian Wood** was played twice; first as a concert piece, and later with choreography by Helen Herbertson. The first performance of my **9th Two-mouth Sonata** was performed by Hartley Newnham. **Boit** and **Body Sonata** were also repeated. Jacqui had several pieces, one using Cage's **Songbooks**, the other - **Animal Crackers** - where I provided music by improvising on banjo, dressed in a bear costume.

The event for which the Ashes of Sydney is best remembered took place on Sydney Harbour, in March 1977. Billed as the *Ashes of Sydney Festival*, the audience was on board a ferry, with some performances which took place on board in transit between other performances around some part of the harbour foreshore. A number of other composers, choreographers, dancers and musicians took part in this event<sup>13</sup>.

My aims in the ferry event were to produce new music in a 'theatre' that would not impose its historical baggage on our endeavours. This event has also been acknowledged by Martin Wesley-Smith as a starting point for other large-scale environmental performances at Wattamolla involving a group of people led by him who had been participants in the Ashes of



Sydney Ferry concert. The works done in the ferry event were largely works by others, and though it was scheduled to take place a performance of mine using the Tupperware Gamelan had to wait till later.

### The real Gamelan

When I studied with Sculthorpe the Gamelan, like other Asian music was respected as a wonderful tradition which I, like many western composers could use as a source. However, after I played in the Gamelan in 1974, under the direction of Iwan Natapradja, it became a model for a set of instruments which required diversified and non-specialist performance skills - a musical aesthetic similar to what I found so appealing about the Scratch Orchestra. I found this work ethic more liberating than that which prevails in Western society and its music. Iwan was not only a singer and a musician playing many instruments, but he was also a Wayang Puppeteer, a dancer, a person who repaired the instruments as well as made the performers' costumes.

It has now become very fashionable among many younger composers to spurn Sculthorpe's ideas about the influence of Asian music on Australian composition. But perhaps the musical fashion, in a decade no longer ready to accommodate cultural diversity, simply dictates a more homogenous music. Fashion can only be a vehicle for some form of sentimentality, that emotional surrogate that allows an individual to feel comfortable within the Status Quo.

### Redfern

I tried to rediscover my roots in Catholicism, unfiltered by my middle class seminary formation. Initially the impetus for this rediscovery came from the ideas of Cage and Cardew, and their respect for the place of

humanity in nature, but ultimately it came from the experiment in basic christian community living I had seen in the Catholic church in Redfern.

Here I found radical theology based on passionate commitment to Gospel values, which were also its model of intellectual honesty. This theology made no distinction between real poverty and spiritual poverty, such a distinction being regarded as 'privatisation of the gospel'. Under the shining inspiration of Mrs. Colleen Perry, known to many as 'Mum Shirl', the priest, Fr. Ted Kennedy<sup>14</sup> allowed the presbytery (his house) to become home to itinerant members of the local aboriginal community. Upsetting church authorities, Ted handed entire buildings back to the aboriginal community. One of these became the Aboriginal Medical Service. His total abdication from positions where he could 'play God', showed many, including myself, the unlimited spiritual freedom which individuals throughout history have found through risk and abandonment.

I did not live in a community as such but in households filled with people who had settled here from Indonesia, Malaysia and much later, Vietnam. Some of these included devout adherents of Islam or Buddhism, as well as some who were Christian, and others who sought truth outside a religious tradition. It was a far cry from my previous experience of Community based on a single religion and single race. The Redfern encounter extended my concept of 'experimental' beyond Scratch Music ideals. I also saw some of the reality of people displaced from land that is traditionally their source of spiritual identity, trying to live under a culture which respects land only for its capital value.

At the time I was not employed in music, but as a Computer technician. I had become fed up with the expectations modern society placed on musicians. By contrast, Ernie Gallagher doing 'bad performance' was like a breath of fresh air. I wanted to be an amateur, to be free of what society wanted me to deliver. In summary, a gradual turn around in my cultural perceptions was taking place. This was best represented in a number of musical instruments which I constructed called the *Tupperware Gamelan*.

### The Tupperware Gamelan

Having played in a real Gamelan I was under no illusion that what I had built was not even a Gamelan. The majority of the instruments of the Tupperware Gamelan were not percussive. An audience member once took me to task because one or two of the instruments were not genuine Tupperware ! The first instruments were the *Humming Drums*, based on a circuit found in a popular electronics magazine for electronic bongo drums. They were mounted in plastic. This made easy work of mounting potentiometers and sockets, requiring only a soldering iron. The ready moulded plastic containers were cheap and easily replaceable. I had always admired the wonderful plastic instruments made by Steve Dunstan several years before. Today plastic is the poor man's china, and fashioning this into a set of musical instruments - for which it was never intended - was a way of transforming what I considered to be an icon of the consumer society.



Greg Schiemer with the modified UFOs for Porcelain Dialogue, 1983.



The Humming Drums are spurred momentarily into oscillation when a person touches the plates of the instruments, causing an AC field to be discharged at 50Hz. I experimented with different frequencies to activate these instruments. For this, another instrument produced frequencies controlled by skin resistance. This instrument, called the *Log Dulcimer*, consisted of seven long rods. Played on its own the Log Dulcimer produced no sound, but by touching these rods and the hands of performers playing the Humming Drums it was possible to produce a wide range of rich timbres (from the Humming Drums). The sound mixing was, in a literal sense, done by hand. These instruments were played at Latrobe University and at the Australia Music Centre in 1977.

A further circuit was partially developed, whose response to changes in light intensity modified the pitch of a number of oscillators. It was originally intended for a third set of instruments which were to be called the *Marrow-bone Jelly Organ*, with a light source mounted over water placed in a dog food bowl.

### UFOs

The UFOs - Ubiquitous Fontana Oscillators - named after Bill Fontana, who first showed me what a dramatic effect movement has on a sine-wave - were the same Oscillator circuit modified to produce continuous oscillation. The device included its own amplifier, was tuneable over a range of a minor sixth, had an on-off switch and was battery operated. The performer could swing the device in a circular fashion above the head, producing doppler-shifts of the audible tone. In a space enclosed by four walls, the doppler-shifted pitches can be heard mixed with the original pitch, producing a flanged effect. These were played spread over a large area.

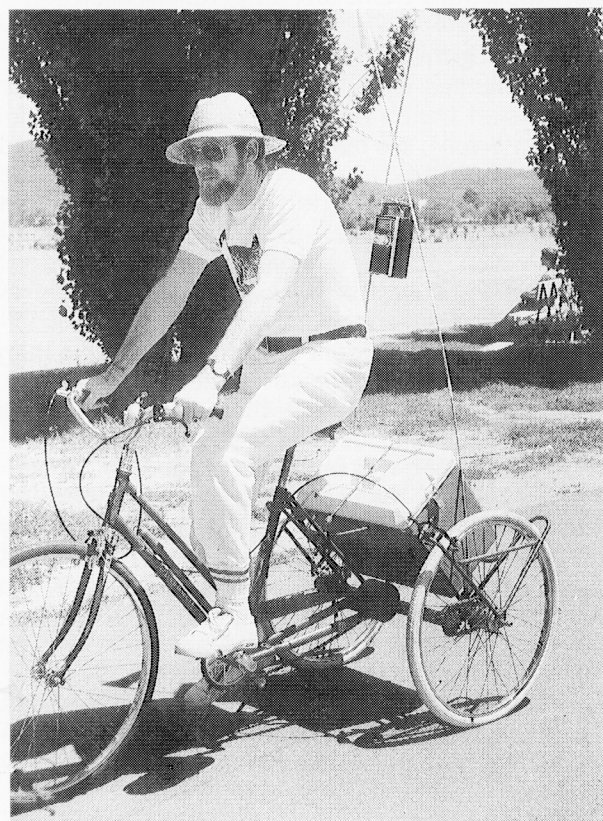
Initially, four UFOs were made especially for a work entitled **Mandala**, which I wrote for one part of a dance trilogy by Yen Lu Wong, called **Between Silence and Light**. The work also used Bamboo Tubes, and Factory Alarm Bells fashioned into hand-bells. Organised by the One Extra Company, it was performed on the northern broadwalk of the Sydney Opera House in 1980.

A second piece called **Mandala 2** was performed with an ensemble of sixteen UFOs, tuned over five and a half octaves. It was a special performance which involved sixteen people, some of whom were actors, musicians and others who were members of a community who had made their home with former inmates of an institution for handicapped people. The unusual but simple performance gestures in the music required no special skills. This allowed all ensemble members to feel free from the pressure of meeting conventional social expectations about playing music, or to feel free of the tyranny of 'normal' music. It was performed at the first Leichhardt festival in 1981.

### Porcelain Dialogue 1983

Kai Tai Chan, director of One Extra Dance Company approached me about a further work in 1982. He wanted a piece that was almost a sound sculpture. I began by making a small sequencer which played a quasi percussion accompaniment. It was my first in-

volvement in Digital methods for controlling music since I abandoned it after 1975. It only became possible for me to build the digital sequencer because I



Concert on Bicycles, Canberra, 1983

knew of a digital process that could be 'interfered' with by a performer using toggle switches (similar to Carl Vine's *Patent Little Marvel*). I completed this box in less than three weeks. But as the music was not suitable, I set about modifying the UFOs so that they could be turned off and on and retuned without having to be held in one's hand. This became the basis for a piece called **Moving Sound/Falling Light**, which also had the working title of **Porcelain Dialogue**. The sequencer was then used to perform all the controls now possible on the UFOs. However the UFOs had become fixtures rather than mobile units because the cords on which the instruments swung - this time like pendulums - were signal cables connecting them to the sequencer. Though this met Kai Tai Chan's requirement that the whole ensemble of instruments could be operated by one of the dancers, it was a departure from my original concept of the Tupperware Gamelan - musicians interacting with each other<sup>15</sup>.

### A Manifesto after the act

These instruments have since slowly deteriorated and are almost beyond repair now. Through that process of deterioration, I have had to let go of a musical 'edifice' and take its ideas instead. There will be no trace of what all the instruments sounded like, only in the memory of those who played or heard them. In another sense though this very process of letting go, which seems like a denial, is only a way of renewal. If the ideas were good, they will re-emerge

and be remembered in another form, if only I keep the doors open. The ideas are not easy for me to write about in abstraction, as they are the by product of a method of working, a sort of *manifesto after the act*, rather than a prescription for action. The healthiest thing to do now would be publish the circuits to allow other people to use them as a fresh starting point.

### Recent Development

Exploring the effects of moving sounds by making a sound source portable was one idea that re-emerged in the **Concert on Bicycles** in Canberra 1983. The sounds, reproduced by transistor radio receivers strapped to bicycles ridden by members of the audience, were transmitted monaurally via an AM community radio station 2XX. The program was a specially prepared tape made in collaboration with students at the Canberra School of Music for the event, which lasted about an hour. The stereo image constantly changed - subject to the cyclists' motion - and had the welcome intrusion of outdoor sounds.

In 1979 when Simone de Haan and I tried using the Trombonist and his instrument as a Theremin Antenna, we discussed working together, but it was 1983 before anything happened. The project was designed, at the advice of John Crocker from the Canberra School of Music, using a build-it-yourself micro-processor kit called the DATUM<sup>16</sup>.

This was designed by Malcolm Haskard and John Duval at the South Australian Institute of Technology. I bought it, built and programmed it to work with my 64-way analogue patch bay, which I also designed and built, for the Voltage Control synthesiser modules built by Julian Driscoll. This was how we planned to put the idea into effect but the system was not completed before Simone had gone to Europe. In the mean time, I realised that the board needed not much extra circuitry and a few slight modifications to run MIDI. Through the DATUM I have been able to find out how MIDI actually works, rather than approach it the way it has been presented by manufacturers for mass consumption.

By April 1985, I was using the DATUM to eavesdrop on a number of MIDI synthesisers I had access to. In 1986, I moved to the Sydney Conservatorium and by November in collaboration with Graeme Leak had produced the interactive MIDI performance called **Monophonic Variations**<sup>17</sup>.

Just as it only became possible for me to use Digital hardware for **Porcelain Dialogue** when I found a way for the performer to redirect the process, so too with **Monophonic Variations**. The same process for generating Polynomials was implemented, but using machine code instructions rather than hardware. MIDI coded performance gestures made by a percussionist provided the 'interference' rather than codes input from toggle switches.

Eventually, this led to **Polyphonic Variations** in 1987 - my first-ever commissioned work - played by Graeme Leak. This uses a performer affected algorithm to generate MIDI Note Numbers, similar to that described in *NMA6*. The DATUM took on the character of another human performer improvising with a live performer, its material being determined at the moment of performance by the process defined in the

algorithm. **Polyphonic Variations** resembles an ensemble of Percussionists improvising isorhythms.

More importantly, the piece avoids using commercial MIDI software where the composer is forced to become a consumer at one level in a musical hierarchy. Here the piece is software, which relies less on the 'memory' of the composer, even less on the memory of the computer and more on the intuition of the performer, by making algorithms that respond in a heuristic fashion to the MIDIed performance gestures. Here a score seems superfluous. A score keeps a performer the recipient of a composer's directives, by being a one-way mode of communication called *Simplex*<sup>17</sup>. My program, which communicates with the performer in *Duplex* mode, puts a performer 'on-line' in a composition process, allowing the performer to compose in real time.

The South Australian firm which manufactured the DATUM expressed interest in my MIDI modifications and sought to include it in a new machine. Initially I was granted leave from the Conservatorium in the first half of 1989 to work on this project, but in order to pursue its artistic objectives, I had to sever ties with the company. Using facilities in the School of Electronic Engineering at the South Australian Institute of Technology, I built the machine myself and called it the *MIDI Tool Box*.

This new machine - based on the Motorola 68HC11 - is a MIDI machine capable of 48 channels of MIDI, four channels of A/D (8-bit) and D/A (8-bit & 12-bit), 2 x 16 bit bi-directional parallel ports, an RS-232 port, a Synchronous Port capable of being used as a SMPTE or LAN interface, and five programmable timers capable of eg. MIDI to Pitch conversion. The device can be programmed in C as well as Cross-Assembler from any Host machine. The device uses EEPROM to store code without requiring a disk-based host machine during performance. Its main use is interactive MIDI performance, and is meant to be used by those who have some special musical application for which no MIDI hardware/software package exists - provided they can live with a machine that doesn't pretend to be user-friendly. User-friendliness has got more to do with the way MacDonald's treats its customers rather than the way eg. the violin has served World music.

I am currently writing the code for an interactive performance with members of *Pipeline*, Simone de Haan and Daryl Pratt.

Musically, the meanderings of the last nineteen years have almost come the full circle. Though my grasp of technology does not yet allow the sort of Real Time Audio processing which initially led me down this track, my fight to come to terms with the technology has made way for involvement with performers - like Graeme Leak, Simone de Haan and Daryl Pratt - which I believe will establish more of the attributes of living music in current music technology. Only then can we serve notice on the distinction between composed and improvised music, and the class system it propagates.

The main obstacle to this is still the colonising mentality which says that an Australian must go abroad and acquire the pedigree of a foreign musician to become a worthy musical specimen. We are still being taught to deny our own value by being

turned towards opportunities offshore. The quest to get our music internationally accepted has reduced the Australian composer to a supplier of something in demand overseas. Yet our culture, unlike our economy doesn't have a balance of payments problem. We don't owe anyone anything, least of all those abroad.

I believe the problem now lies with those, both foreign and native-born, who maintain 'dynasties' here to colonise new music before it develops its autonomy. Music needs fewer entrepreneurs - those who build careers using the work of others - just more people prepared to find their own way. Just as our Bicentennial has taught me to accept that there are no accolades when I don't produce an exploitable musical product, an entrepreneur must accept he has no place in the experiment. Experiment is the only sign of a living tradition, and those not committed to working within such a tradition will go on rebuilding Babel. Nineteen years further on, opposition to such experiment still comes from those who use the formulae rather than the lessons of the past as their only insurance.

#### Footnotes

1. Hirst, D. "What happened when Australia went digital?" **NMA 6** NMA Publications 1988.

2. I would like to acknowledge the help of the following people in the preparation of this article: Libby Dempster, Jilba Wallace, Ronnie Arnold, Kai Tai Chan, Virginia Lovell, Peter Mumme, Larry Sitsky, Peter Evans, Geoffrey Barnard, Ernie Gallagher, Carl Vine, Chris Mann, Ted Kennedy, Richard Toop, Peter MacCallum.

3. Members of AZ Music at this time were David Ahern, Philip Ryan, Ian Millis, Roger Frampton, Deidre and Peter Evans, Peter Kennedy, Barbara Hall, Ernie Gallagher, Lillian Kristal, Greg Matheson, Phillipa Cullen, Geoff Collins, Geoffrey Barnard and myself. Later members included Robert Irving, Alan Holley, Cameron Allen and Carl Vine.

4. To give credit to Donald Peart, ISCM was responsible for a number of first public performances. An early version of my *Laotian Wood* was played in September 1970, followed in 1972 by *Phyla*.

5. Her choreographic sketches show nine dancers but I am fairly certain there were only three. These sketches also indicate strong underlying dramatic ideas which had been inspired by the potential she saw in the new technology

6. See also "Monophonic Variations - Spontaneous vs pre-meditated composition" in **NMA 6** op. cit. Peter and Roger Frampton had formed a new improvisation group with Phil Treloar, following the break-up of Teletopa. Roger, Phil and Jack Thorncraft also formed another trio which, after Howie Smith arrived in Sydney, eventually became the Jazz Co-op.

7. Four working models still exist in the Elder Conservatorium's Electronic Music studio in Adelaide. They were constructed by Arthur Spring of Henley, Sydney.

8. For the record, in that same program, under the direction of Stefan Haag and Doug Richardson was the work of Peter Mumme, Paul Prendergast, Dave Brown and Ron Eden; a Melbourne based audio-visual electronic music ensemble called New Music Centre; Jim Penberthy with a string quartet playing live from parts displayed on four video screens; Steve Dunstan with his electronic musical instruments created in perspex; Harvey Dillon and Harvey Holmes from the Uni. of NSW with the Timbron; a wall of four panel-mounted sculptures built by Stan Ostojka-Kotkowski which housed Theremins (work done during a period as Creative Arts Fellow at A.N.U.) and a piece composed by Larry Sitsky for these; a video synthesiser built by Mel-

bourne based video artist John Hansen; Bush Video were again represented; Don Banks and John Crocker with the new all digital synthesiser being produced by Tony Furse, and his newly acquired partners Peter Vogel and Kim Ryrrie (This last exhibit did not eventuate as Tony was attending to some design problems).

9. Simon Veitch's 3DIS maps body position with reference to a number of arbitrary points, while Rolf Gehlhaar's Sound Space using ultra-sound also defines space with reference to the perimeter of a performance area, rather than referring to the body's centre of gravity. Both of these are strictly Cartesian rather than Polaroid like the Theremin. They involve projection from some arbitrary point away from the body which at best only defines the shape of its outer surface. For the record, in 1972 I recall Phil Connor and Phillipa discussing:

a) the use of Doppler Radar for sensing a performer's velocity;

b) the use of Video Camera as a means to allow a dancer to control a Synthesiser, bypassing problems associated with a Theremin. (I have since found documents from her estate showing block diagrams in Phillipa's hand of the Video movement interface, which would have been sketched about May or June 1972)

c) the use of Ultra-sonic Sonar devices for achieving the same ends; A paper by Tony Furse in 1976 outlines a Cartesian method for mapping a performance space using Ultra-sound.

10. I consulted with Ronnie Arnold on the question of these Laban parameters in an attempt to check my recollection of the discussions with Phillipa. I cannot recollect anything that would explain why she would have linked Acceleration and Laban Flow. It is an still an open question what she understood by both terms Flow and Acceleration.

11. Snell, J. "A digital Oscillator which can generate 256 sine waves in real time." **Computer Music Journal** no2, 1978.

12. "Harmoniac: A Digital Signal Processor" in **Speech Hearing Language Research Centre: Working Papers** (ed P. Bernard) pp. 27-99 Macquarie University Press 1980

13. For full details of this event and the work of those who participated see **New Music Newspaper** no2 Melbourne Oct/Nov 1977

14. see **Rock Choppers** (esp. Chapter 7 *Freedom of Speech* pp 172 - 176) by Edmund Campion, Penguin 1982; and also **Mum Shirl - An Autobiography** written with assistance from Bobbi Sykes. Heinemann 1982

15. See Warren Burt, "Playing by Numbers" **Australian Personal Computer** May 1983. To this I would add that the tuning, derived from a circuit used in the Marrow-bone Jelly Organ, was selected by a series of digital pulses. The control was synchronous (unlike MIDI, which was just coming into use) and had an individual line to each of 16 units, each with independent clock rates - audio as well as sub-audio. Modulating the oscillators with Polynomial bit-streams produced a wide range of rhythms and timbres. The only surviving recording (on The Australian Bicentennial Collection, Canberra 1988) was pressed before I found out, and is not a good representation of these instruments. At least nine of the sixteen UFOs were not working properly after they had been set-up. A huge space was required and the instruments needed to be left up for rehearsal several days before recording. We had one day. I thought that another opportunity to record it properly would come later and never expected it would be included on the disc.

16. Based on a Motorola 6802

17. see Schiemer, **NMA 6** op.cit

18. Schiemer op. cit.



# The Clifton Hill Community Music Centre 1976 - 1983

*Ernie Althoff*

In mid-1975 composer Ron Nagorcka returned to Australia from a sojourn in San Diego, California. With him came American Warren Burt, to take up a teaching position with the Music Department of Latrobe University. Both had been involved in the running of the *Atomic Cafe*<sup>1</sup>, the University of California at San Diego's alternative performance series. Nagorcka had also witnessed the bitter infighting and factionalism that had plagued the Melbourne branch of the ISCM (International Society for Contemporary Music) and the New Music Centre in the early 1970s. From these experiences he formulated the principles that would govern the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre over its eight year lifespan. They were such that:

1. No money was charged from the audience, thereby eliminating the notion of possibly not getting one's money's worth (This did alter slightly - see 1981 section). No money was paid to composers or performers. No equipment was supplied, and advertising was mostly word of mouth or very inexpensively photocopied posters. The removal of economics from the musical equation was of supreme importance in setting up a space with a truly alternative set of values.

2. Access to the space was completely open and no restrictions were placed on style or content of performances. All one had to do was phone the co-ordinator of the Centre and a date for an event would be arranged.

3. The centre was run anarchically. A person elected, or was elected, to be co-ordinator who was then responsible for allocating performance times, opening and closing the building and allocating the minimal publicity jobs. When that person tired of the co-ordinator's job, it was passed on to another. In this way, a sense of continuity and adapting to changing needs was built into the Centre's operation.

These principles were tested with concert series at La Mama Theatre and then at the Students' Church, Carlton from August to December 1975. At the beginning of 1976, space became available at the Organ Factory, a community centre in Clifton Hill housing the New Theatre group, after-school play groups and other civic action organisations. The first concert series by the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre at the Organ Factory was held shortly after with Nagorcka as co-ordinator.

In early 1977 John Campbell founded the New & Experimental Music Show (originally titled Amputa-

tions) on Community Radio 3CR. This helped to publicize CHCMC. Campbell, Burt, David Chesworth and John Crawford all presented programs. In later years most of the CHCMC concerts were taped on cassette and then played on the program, providing broader exposure for the Centre and the performers and more than satisfying the station's 50% Australian content requirement. Eventually, the program moved to 3RRR FM.

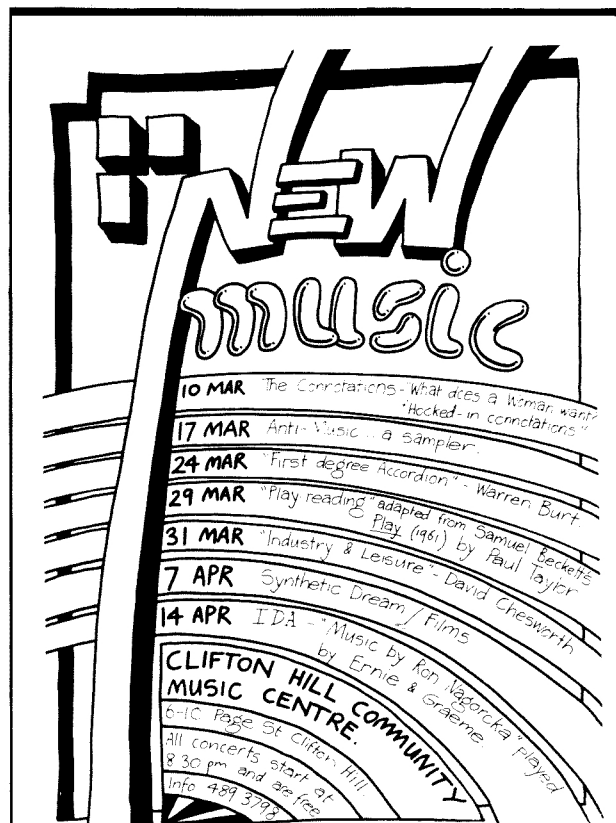
There were four areas for performance in the double storey factory. Downstairs was a large open space interspersed by pillars over a wood floor. This area was used later for large-scale works, particularly by Graeme Davis and myself, although Randelli (Robert Randall and Frank Bendinelli) used it for video installations in 1978. Upstairs was a small room where most of the early concerts were held, and a small but well equipped theatre with stage, lights and sloped seating. Next to the theatre was a carpeted foyer area. This foyer area was the only place equipped with a heater. In winter the rest of the building, like all good experimental music centres the world over was *cold*. Extra chairs and tables resided in various sections of the building. There was also a piano, two big hi-fi speaker boxes with cables, a hot-water urn and mugs, and adequate electric power points.

## **Musical Styles**

The Centre's second principle meant that there were probably as many musical styles as ensembles and performers, but the 'no finance' principle did push a few things to the fore. The first was a healthy and inventive participation in the low-budget ethic. This occurred in several ways. One was the use of cheap and low-calibre instruments, and in people trustingly borrowing and lending each other equipment. In the earliest Tsk Tsk Tsk line-ups both the electric pianos had some non-functioning keys and the electric guitar was a borrowed K-Mart special (The equipment of many bands improved in later years and, as people moved into areas demanding better equipment such as video production and studio electronics, the production became more sophisticated). It was well accepted that low-budget equipment helped to 'shape' the music, not devalue it; there was no stigma attached to its use, although some music students claimed they hated the sounds of out-of-tune toy organs. Mention of toys takes us into another area: when no 'real' instruments were available,



people used toys, found objects and invented home-built devices for music making. The use of the portable cassette recorder as an instrument for real-time electronic composition and performance was



Poster design by Ernie Althoff for the March - April series of concerts, 1982.

pioneered at the Centre, first by Burt and Nagorcka as Plastic Platypus and then by Davis and myself. Davis and I both still use cassette manipulation in our scores and performances. Other synth-type devices also appeared. Bands such as Laughing Hands, heavily dependent on electronic amplification and treatment devices, usually had a contact-miked toy guitar with rubber band strings in there somewhere.

The second important feature was a strong leaning towards works embodying multi-arts disciplines. This resulted from confidence in the freedom to invent and explore musical forms without feeling a need to gratify the audience. Even the most conventional ensembles surprised audiences with music-theatre pieces every now and then. Tableau, drama, mime and dance were incorporated inventively into concerts, and much work was done in the Super-8 film and video fields. Indeed, the Super-8 film people saw the ethics of CHCMC aptly befitting their medium. Film and/or video concerts, either combined with music or performance or just shown straight, were featured in all the years of the Centre's operation. Colour slides were also used. Installations activated by audience or performers were constructed. If a performer wanted movement in a piece but couldn't find a dancer or actor willing to perform without payment, they worked out their own set of steps and *became* the dancer. Most people took on these challenges of new roles in a serious, purposeful and consequently successful manner.

Performers were genuinely interested in the musical directions of other performers although the 'music student' performers looked upon the radical musical adventurousness of the non-academic with perhaps just a tinge of envy. People questioned and commented freely. Performance arrangements and commitments stayed flexible, and concerts by one-off hybrids made up of members from various different bands often provided a new and challenging outlet for musical ideas. The Dave and Phil Duo and Music 4 both had a longer life, Tsk Tsk Tsk had a large and varied workforce for their many projects, and I collaborated with Burt, Chris Mann and Tsk Tsk Tsk for valuable learning experience.

### 1976-1977

Burt took over as co-ordinator from June 1976 to December 1977 and Chesworth took up the job in January 1978. Very little of the extremely rough and ready documentation remains from these first two years (neither Nagorcka nor Burt kept accessible files) but Nagorcka tried hard to nurture the 'community' aspect of the Centre, with even a Greek music ensemble and dancers performing at one concert. However these bodies drifted away, probably because of the non-profit concept. This left those composers and performers who really needed a space to get their music played. Given the music climate in the rest of Melbourne, it is not surprising the Centre became a focus for experimental music.

Documentation of events at the Centre during the period from May to December 1977 can be found in the three slim issues of **The new music newspaper**, edited by Burt and Les Gilbert to call attention to "the enormous amount of new music in Melbourne". Their first editorial also mentions the attitudes of the mass media to "the broad mass of fine, strong work being done in isolation" as being condescending, non-comprehending or completely ignoring it<sup>2</sup>. Issue No 1 contains an article by Nagorcka expressing his views on the Centre, and an article by Burt entitled **Out and About** - a personal concert diary in which eight CHCMC concerts are briefly described. The back pages of the first two issues feature lists of concert dates, 25 of which were CHCMC events. Burt and/or Nagorcka did six, Robin Teese and Bill Fontana (these days world-renowned for his large-scale electronic cityscape installations) both did two, and the others included events by Gilbert, Dom de Clario, the Australian Percussion Ensemble, Barry Conyngham's Music Now and Tsk Tsk Tsk. Issue No 3 contains detailed reviews of three CHCMC events: Robin Teese's **Songs Without Foundation**, Ros Bandt's **Coathanger Event** - a 'hands on' installation for an exploring audience, and Nagorcka's epic opera in three parts: **Atom Bomb**, **Son of Atom Bomb** and **Atom Bomb Meets Godzilla**<sup>3</sup>.

### 1978

Chesworth co-ordinated four concert series with a total of 29 concerts. Tsk Tsk Tsk were responsible for eight, Nagorcka and/or Burt for five, people from tertiary music courses (mostly Latrobe, but also some from Melbourne University and from Melbourne State College) for seven, Randelli for three live/video performance concerts, two were 'mixed nights' of many

different pieces, and four events were by Davis, David Tolley and The Fab Four (a one-off ensemble featuring Philip Brophy, Chesworth and Jane and John Crawford). Descriptions of some of these early events can be found in **New Music** 1978-1979<sup>4</sup>. The attitude of the then Music Board of the Australia Council to CHCMC was such that some antiquated recording equipment (remnants from New Music Centre days) stored in a back room at the Organ Factory was requested to be returned.

## 1979

The Centre produced four concert series of 30 concerts: Tsk Tsk Tsk did seven, Nagorcka and/or Burt did three, Chesworth did six (two solo, two with Brophy as the Dave and Phil Duo, and two with Robert Goodge - the first emergence of Essendon Airport), tertiary music people did three, Davis and I participated in five (the debut of I.D.A. with Davis and Nagorcka and myself occurred in October), plus work by Crawford, Chris Wyatt, Rainer Linz, Ad Hoc (an early ensemble with Chris Knowles and James Clayden), Jim Gott and Paul Turner. By the middle of the year, as audience sizes had increased, quite a few concerts were held in the theatre area.

## 1980

A summer season of seven improvisation evenings in January and February started the year off, and proved how diverse the definitions of improvisation could be. 1980 was also the year of **New Music** magazine, co-ordinated by Brophy and Chesworth for a total of five issues<sup>5</sup>. A process of concert review by volunteer, and subsequent interview between reviewer and performer/s filled the pages of four of these magazines with various writing styles, levels of articulation and typewriter fonts. Unfortunately, it was in one instance also the vehicle for an article containing the worst abuse of the freedom implied by the second of the Centre's original principles, and by the editorial statement in each issue<sup>6</sup>. This led to the first organised meeting the Centre ever staged in December 1980 to discuss the differences of opinion which had arisen.



IDA (l to r: Graeme Davis, Ernie Althoff, Ron Nagorcka) perform Althoff's text piece *Oh no, not another* at CHCMC in June 1980.

Concert action stepped up grandly: Series One had eight concerts, Series Two had nine, Series Three had ten and Series Four had 16 concerts running Mondays and Wednesdays through November and December. These included Burt's **Epic Monumental Project** over five evenings, and Tsk Tsk Tsk, Laughing Hands and Chesworth in various guises with four each. I.D.A. and Wyatt both did three. Ensembles from Latrobe University did four and a vast array of performers did the rest, ranging from the punk-styled Lunatic Fringe through to the jazzed-styled Barry Veith and Judy Jacques, with nearly everything in between, including the Carrington Group string orchestra. In addition to CHCMC concerts, two benefit concerts were held at Melbourne University's Guild Theatre to help fund the magazine, and a 13 event series over an eight day period was run by Chesworth at Latrobe Union Gallery to help pay the rent at the Organ Factory.

## 1981

1981 was another year of intense activity for the Centre, with 41 concerts held over the four series. One series with two concerts per week was commonplace in the years 1980-1982. The 'stalwarts': Tsk Tsk Tsk, Chesworth solo or with band, Laughing Hands, I.D.A., The Connotations and Peter Simondson's various bands, all presented between four and six events. There were also eight people who had performed in previous years, and eight total newcomers. Two LP records accompanying the **New Music** magazines were released, and a final benefit concert to help pay for the printing of the last issue was held at the beginning of the year to a thoroughly packed house. It was amusing how audiences would swell in size the moment an admission price was charged!

April saw the Centre's second meeting: the building's committee had increased the rent from \$100 to over \$300 per year. It was decided unanimously to adhere to the original unwritten principles of the Centre, but a voluntary donations jar was positioned in the foyer which worked well. Concerts were free until mid 1982 when a \$1 donation was requested, and two benefit concerts were held to pay the rent: one in August 1982 and the other in October 1983.

With an increase in the exposure of the Centre's participants in other areas, concert audiences grew more varied and increased in size again. Both Brophy and Chesworth's bands had attracted a punk/new wave audience from hotel and club circuits, and more bands started getting work in these venues. Probably the first major acceptance by the visual arts world of the Centre was through Tsk Tsk Tsk's July 1980 **Asphixiation** (sic) - **what is this thing called Disco?** installation at the George Paton Gallery at Melbourne University<sup>8</sup>. In 1981 large contingents of CHCMC performers worked in art galleries in Melbourne, regional centres and interstate<sup>9</sup>. This resulted in an influx of visual artists, filmmakers, critics, gallery administrators and arts bureaucrats to the Centre. Some, like the new wave sector, understood and were at ease with the Centre's modus operandi while others, again like the new wave sector, misunderstood the Centre's pluralism and were

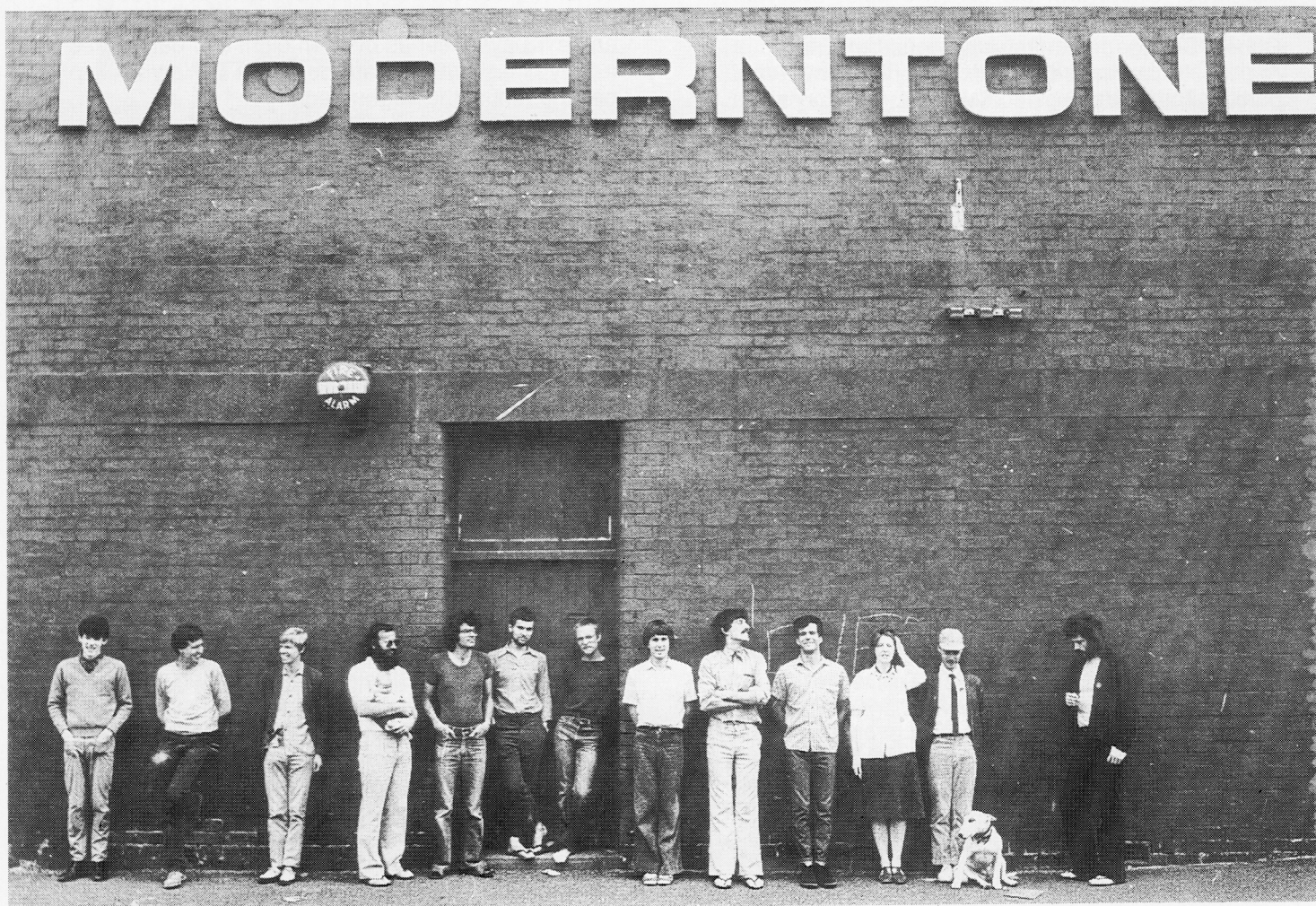


disappointed and annoyed to enjoy their 'favourite new act' one week and to witness something that was often totally incomprehensible to them the next.

Perhaps as a result of the attention from the visual arts world, derivations of French-based arts theory and criticism began to infiltrate some aspects of the activities at CHCMC. A strange manifestation, it attracted much ardent defense and as much equally ardent abuse from the informed and the ignorant on both sides of the fence. Semiotic labels such as 'first degree, second degree, third degree...' were bandied about with great passion and great irresponsibility. Strangely inaccurate stories about the Centre's 'militantly rigid ideological thrust' began to filter back

## 1982

After four and a half years as co-ordinator, Chesworth handed the position over to Andrew Preston. Between them they opened the doors to 40 concerts for the year. Both Burt and I gave five concerts each, Preston, The Connotations and Chesworth did three each and Simondson, Tsk Tsk Tsk, Knowles and Di Emery did two each. Statistically this was another successful year for the Centre but, on another level, things had begun to change. Audience sizes diminished and, for the first time since 1976, the co-ordinator had to ring performers and suggest they do something in order to fill a series. Regulars started forming little one-off bands with each other, some-



*CHCMC group portrait from 1980 (l to r): Phil Brophy, Robert Goodge, David Chesworth, Robin Teese, Paul Turner, Gordon Harvey, Paul Schutz, Chris Wyatt, Mark Pollard, Ian Russell, Jane Crawford, John Crawford, Graeme Davis.*

to CHCMC from other capitals. It should be emphasized here that *none* of these events in any way altered the working structure of the Centre.

In August the Centre hosted one of the evening concerts of the **1981 Music and Technology Conference**, much to the chagrin of sections of Melbourne's music academia, who otherwise avoided CHCMC totally. Several of the overseas delegates praised the Centre, comparing it favourably with New York's The Kitchen, not only in politics and architecture but also in lack of heating!

times producing innovative results. New people were still appearing: Sue Blakey, Paul Taylor, the tapes of Anti-Music and Sydney musician Louis Burdett were some. In the fourth series, Preston planned four Music Forum events: Brophy, Burt, Adrian Martin and Nagorcka all had an evening each to espouse their musical philosophies, fantasies or foibles and to discuss the ensuing comments, questions and criticisms of the audience. These had mixed results, ranging from voices raised in heated debate to yawning and leaving early, but everything was possible and permissible.

## 1983

To start the year's activities, CHCMC played host to a series of nine afternoon and evening events for the first *Melbourne Fringe Arts Festival* in February and March. It featured a mixture of regulars and new Fringe performers and filmmakers. From 30 March to 15 June, Preston organized and mostly cajoled material for ten concerts. Preston, Davis, Burt, Goodge and I (tried and true names) kept the events coming. Even Nagorcka performed again after an eighteen month absence from the CHCMC stage. Most notable amongst the few newcomers were New Zealanders Gary Fox and David Watson, in Australia for that year's *Anzart Festival* in Tasmania. They made special trips to the mainland for the express purpose of performing at CHCMC. However, Preston found it harder and harder to fill series and audiences were still dwindling. The altered social and economic climates of the mid-80s, compared to those of the late 70s and even early 80s, led to a marked change in people's responses to experimentation in any artform. This was distinctly noticeable in the increasingly conservative attitudes of tertiary arts faculties and their students.

Disaster struck the Centre in early June when work began on extensive renovations to the building. The last concert was moved to the Living Room in Richmond, and for the next four months the only sounds from the building were those of construction equipment.

During this period, Preston handed the position of co-ordinator over to Goodge, who ran a series of eight concerts in October and November, beginning with a well attended rent-paying benefit concert. The accompanying flyer mentioned that the renovations were nearly complete, and that people should put their names on a mailing list for the following year. It also carried the news that the Organ Factory Committee had applied for funding from the Victorian Ministry for the Arts, as well as the standard invitation for performers to present in the usual manner. The last concert for the year was held on 30 November with bands formed by Goodge and Martin, films by Ralph Traviato and Paul Fletcher (of Tsk Tsk Tsk and Essendon Airport respectively) and a solo performance by myself.

## 1984

Only four people: Goodge, Preston, Linz and myself, turned up to the Centre's third meeting on 21 March. Many of the Centre's regular performers were still overseas as a result of their participation in the 1983 *Paris Autumn Festival*. Goodge announced that the application for funding had been successful, but that because of his present commitments, he should resign as co-ordinator. I was offered the position but declined, stating that I saw the present co-ordinator's job as "begging non-existent performers for non-existent material for non-existent concerts for non-existent audiences", and not really in keeping with the Centre's original principles. I said it would be better to disband the Centre at this stage. This was agreed upon by the others and the grant was returned to the Ministry. It is ironic that the only time the Centre received funding assistance was at the point when it was disbanding for other reasons. Later that week, I

told Nagorcka of the decision and Nagorcka answered "Yeah, I think you probably did the right thing!"

## Postscript

Sadly, this was 'the end of an era' for the Centre's regular performers. As can be seen, Nagorcka's original principles of establishment of the Centre were upheld until the end. In a way, the 30 posters for concert series from 1978 - 83 tell it all. I would like to see them all reprinted in a future publication, along with lists of the 90 solo performers and ensembles and the 30 or more video and filmmakers who presented at CHCMC in those years. Of course, in the six years that have elapsed since the Centre closed, everyone has moved on. In Art, nothing remains static for long.

## Footnotes

1. The *Atomic Cafe* was founded in October 1974 with Australian Sue Thurgate as co-ordinator up to June 1975, assisted by Burt and Nagorcka. It has occurred intermittently to this day.
2. **The new music newspaper** No. 1, August/September 1977 and **The new music newspaper** No. 2, October/November 1977, both published by the La Trobe University Union Activities Committee, 1977; and **The new music newspaper** No. 3, December 1977/January 1978, University of Melbourne Faculty of Music, 1978.
3. A section of Nagorcka's **Atom Bomb** appears on **NMATAPES 2**, NMA Publications, Melbourne, 1983.
4. **New Music 1978 - 1979**, ed Brophy, P and Chesworth, D, Melbourne, 1980.
5. *ibid* and **New Music Nos 1 - 4**, ed Brophy, P and Chesworth, D, Melbourne, 1980 - 81.
6. **New Music No 3**, pp.4 & 27 and **New Music No 4**, pp.3 - 4, Melbourne, 1980 - 81.
7. **New Music 1978 - 1979** (NON 007) and **New Music 1980** (NON 008), Innocent Records, Melbourne, 1981.
8. A complete account of Tsk Tsk Tsk's performance activities is contained in **Made by Tsk Tsk Tsk 1977 - 1982**, published in Melbourne by the band in 1983. It should be mentioned here that the band's name was really a symbol constructed from three arrows, but electronic typesetting procedures necessitate the use of the standard alphabet alternative.
9. For examples, see **Noise and Muzak** catalogue, George Paton Gallery, Melbourne University, July 1981 and **New Musical Performance - music by Australians** catalogue, Ballarat Fine Art Gallery, September 1981.

## Further Reading

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# Without the land there is no music, or why I live where I live

Ron Nagorcka

As I write I sit perched on a rock atop Black Sugarloaf; a little mountain in northern Tasmania. My back door is about 20 minutes down to the east through wet sclerophyll forest. A marvelous 360 degree vista surrounds me and the sounds of the rest of humanity only occasionally reach me through the veil of a vast and gentle *silence*. It's a great place to meditate or to dream.

A cold westerly change is on the way. Over Devonport I can watch a great stormy drama unfold. Turning southeast however the skies above the midlands are clear and further east a haze is obscuring the abruptness of Ben Lomond. To the extreme south west Cradle Mountain and the steeple like Barn Bluff are hidden today in a rumble of clouds. Even Quamby Bluff, squatting like a protective bear in front of the walls of Jerusalem has those small clearings I call its eyes mistily obscured. It's raining now on the Dazzler Range to the north and I can't catch the usual glint of the sun on the sea beyond, but I can still catch a gleam from the Tamar in its mighty valley.

Such a magnificent vista of course always sets one to thinking of many strange things. Very often after it has taken my breath away I try to use it to enlarge my own ecological perspective. Then a splendid vision from afar reveals a Pandora's box of horrors. I see scars of clearfelled forest on the slopes of the distant Tiers, in closer State Forest and very nearby where a private company has just finished woodchipping some of the very last pristine local forest. On any clear, calm day I can watch the pollution from Georgetown and Launceston settle over the Tamar Valley. There are farms on steep slopes devoid of trees with ploughed paddocks ribboned with troughs of erosion after this year's heavy rains. The forests all around have felt the bite of the axe, bulldozer or chainsaw, and large areas of them have been replaced with radiata pine, blotting the landscape with its foreign tinge of green.

Even here, in one of the least disturbed places in rural Australia, the land is being handled with such violence and lack of respect that it is very sick indeed. Evidence of the cause of this Great Illness stands next to me here on the mountain, a trigonometric point consisting of a steel pyramid set in concrete, whose purpose I surmise has something to do with the *farkarwee* problem. Around me all the taller trees have been felled to give clear sightings.

I wonder, observing this scientific icon, what legend did the local Aboriginal people in the past

have about the mountain? I wonder did they climb a big tree to look at the view? There were certainly some mighty big ones around at the time. I have measured burnt out stumps six metres wide at the base. There is hardly a tree of that size left in all the vast forests below me.

(A rock just moved near me. Must be a creature around. One lives in our cellar - so quick we call it *Stealth*. We think it's a long-tailed marsupial mouse. A raven is singing his bass glissandi a little way off, and pigeons, thrush and wattle birds are all around this morning).

Once in response to my questions, an aboriginal musician friend made it clear to me that I would find the answers that I sought not in his culture or my own, but by seeking them from the land itself. It is now quite clear that we Australians are being forced to heed that advice. After all, without the land there would be no music.

Obviously for those of us privileged enough to live in places where we can still go on healing journeys into wilderness, such things are never far from our consciousness. And as I listen in such places, I think sometimes of the tragedy that only the tiniest tantalising fragments of Tasmania's ancient music survived the holocaust that hit this island paradise. What its intricacies might not reveal of thousands of years of listening.

So I live where I live because I wanted a place away from humankind; to be able to listen through the web of birdsong, wind, leaves, wallaby thumps, frogs, owls, possum and devil screeching for the ancient voices of this land.

## Think globally/act locally, and/or think universally/act personally

Today there is snow on the distant mountains and the Tamar Valley is shrouded in a fine mist. It's been a frosty morning and though it's still quite fine I am sheltering behind a favourite rock and looking north to the smokestacks of Georgetown and the straight blue line of the sea beyond.

On the way up the mountain I was thinking nostalgically about the first public performance of my music in 1971 during **An Evening of Experimental Music by Melbourne Composers**. *Experimental* is an intriguing way to describe music. Did it (does it) in fact mean some type of application of scientific methods to music? Is that possible? Is the composer maybe trying to prove something? Should we fund musical

experiment, and what criteria could determine such funding? Or is music too specifically a product of community and culture for the word *experimental* to be relevant, except maybe in the rarified atmosphere of academia?

At the other extreme of course, music can be seen as a distinctly metaphysical game and while we play with some mathematics inherited from the Greeks, we're as far away from expressing the *Harmony of the Spheres* as they were.

It all makes the composer's role a bit up in the air. Maybe some would argue that the Age of Aquarius will see the composer/musician accorded the status formerly ascribed to priest or astronomer/astrologer. Zulu musicians are apparently losing their high traditional status these days. In India of course, the traditional reverence for the great musician is legendary.

These observations are particularly occasioned by my thoughts about the processes I am currently using to create music, and the scientific and metaphysical theories that might underlie them. What it is, I guess that I am *experimenting with* at the moment.

While preparing program notes in Rome with Roberto Laneri, I was very surprised with the difficulty he had in translating into Italian the term *universal patterning*. For me, this *pattern which connects* as Bateson put it, is seen everywhere and in everything. Always tantalising, but only dimly glimpsed by an ape like me crouching on a rock in Tasmania.

From where I am, though, I can hear the most glorious, gentle symphony. Wattlebirds in quadrophonic, ravens in the distance, honeyeaters and robins. One day I even heard the screech of the White Goshawk; a rare privilege indeed.

The first task of any musician is to listen. So I have begun to record an inventory of the sounds of the mountain. I can then slow down these recordings to explore their rhythms and interval structures. I'd like to investigate various notions. For instance, I find it highly likely that just as visual patterns in nature are determined by the nature of space, and can be configured in precise mathematical ways, so birds would sing in some form of just intonation. Without the vast resources necessary to prove this scientifically, I tend to use my composer's license and assume that they do. Certainly, I can assure you that birds have problems with equal temperament and increasingly, so do I. Then there's rhythm, counterpoint, interspecies communication...

In the piece I have just completed (*Liapatyenna*, contained on **NMATAPE 7**) I used a sampler to create my own sounds from those of the crescent honeyeater. I was able to tune in just intonation or even better at times, to the birds themselves. Samplers involve one in the fascinating business of deeply investigating sounds, improvising with them and creating your own instrumental ensemble. From there the computers of today place contrapuntal facilities at our disposal beyond the wildest dreams of Bach, Ives, Partch or Grainger. And all of it available even to me way off in the bush without the support services and paraphernalia required to hear my music in the context of a concert hall, or even of a Clifton Hill Community Music Centre.

If music is akin to drugs, then this magical new world is compositional mainlining. It all makes composing music for a symphony orchestra look like a two year experiment in a 19th Century laboratory, if we are to continue our scientific metaphor.

Obviously the need for a composer to eat, and to obtain cultural feedback requires a means of disseminating her/his music. Luckily there are signs that the obvious market of thinking people 'out there' is beginning to demand more interesting material. I know a Tasmanian agent who specialises in *hard-to-get music*, and my tapes are ending up in places I never expected them to be. The times, they may be a-changin'.

Inevitably, many people will always demand to see musicians perform and to partake directly in the ritual of music. Equally, many of us can be quite content in an armchair with our ears between a good set of headphones. We all must realise that the plethora of new contexts for musical activity has inevitably changed the way we listen (or don't!). In Australia the examination of these contexts is long overdue. Which remain relevant and which are simply nostalgic indulgent anachronisms that eat up all the available funds? It is an age after all that demands the closest scrutiny of all habitual behaviour.

Meanwhile in a world where faith and hope seem to be glimmering in the democracy of consciousness, it is timely to remember that music, like all art at its intuitive best, goes out beyond the global and in deeper than the local. The composer is always caught, it seems, on a see-saw between the universal and the personal. That's our job - and there's plenty of work to do.

It is a humbling thought to me that I was born into what has perhaps been the most privileged generation in the past and future history of humanity. One day I still dream, as I look at the straight lines of farm fences and the neat squares that describe the delightful township of Westbury beyond... One day it will be acknowledged as a cultural premise that we are all deeply different. Small and beautiful endeavours will dot the landscape. Society will be *deschoolled* and every valley and mountain will ring to a different music.

After all, every place on earth has its own magic if we listen with care.



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# Some observations on Australian experimental music in the 1980's.

*Caroline Wilkins.*

As a composer who arrived in Australia in 1981, I want to situate my discussion of experimental music developments from this time onward, having experienced only indirectly the events and influences that have gone before. These developments are seen from the perspective of my own involvement in them, together with an overall view of the situation during this time.

The 1980's has been a time of enormous diversity and pluralism within experimental music, an essential condition for any new exploration of form or means. Diversity, in turn, brings a dissolution of comparisons (or comparatives) allowing for exchange and cross-referencing of ideas, counteracting the more 'closed' methods of traditionally-based work. By this I mean there is a discourse *over and above* the actual 'analysis' of work, as well as the analysis of that work in relation to, not separated from, its context. For this reason I want to look at the production and performance practice of new music, the place of women and men in this, as well as innovations in form and compositional means.

Composers' awareness of the context in which their music is heard, not only in the sense of performing space but also in the relation of audience to performers, has become a major concern over the past decade. The *response* to what is seen and heard poses questions which address not just what we hear but *how* we hear. This response has shifted, allowing for a multiplicity of meanings to be presented, replacing the 'invisible' measuring line of the concert hall setting or challenging it from within. As the context shifts so does its referential point: one cannot be separated from the other. An important change has come about, where music is heard in relation to itself rather than through any Nineteen Century 'transcendental' notion.

In the early 80's many composers including myself found new contexts for the production and performance of their work in venues such as galleries, theatres, outdoor areas, etc. Often the audience would be included in the overall concept of the piece, allowing for the dynamic of response. Also challenging was the reversal of indoor/outdoor contexts through the introduction of environmental street sound into a formal interior setting. My early work with piano accordion(s), ie. *Calliope* (1984), performing with 'Tina, town clown', at the NSW Gallery, explored such a juxtaposition. Another issue raised by the question of audience response to music is how

much, if at all, a piece needs to be introduced or explained. How much does one need to know of background references and technical detail when it comes to experimental work? Can the work make itself tangible, clear, without this? Does the work need less explanation when the process is very much contained within it? These questions have become a concern to new music in general, but experimental composers seem much more aware of and willing to face the question of *how* we listen.

An analysis of music production must in turn lead to analysis of music as a performative art, which by definition<sup>1</sup>, 'requires public performance'. There is an increasing need to re-examine music within the context of performance practice, and for experimental composers the emphasis has been on practical research and the 'doing' of the work, as well as theoretical and discursive considerations. During the 80's we have again seen the formation of seminar/discussion/workshop situations held with a view to opening up new music practice (ie. the 1986/7 Music Theatre conferences in Canberra, and the open course in Music theatre at the NSW Conservatorium), not only within the specialist field but also including non-specialists. This invitation to work from an interdisciplinary basis means that the possibility is there to investigate practices 'which are not yet named'<sup>2</sup>. The difficulty, as always with any kind of open-ended research, (and this also applies to individual experimental projects) has been inadequate funding in Australia. Work that lies outside certain boundaries of definition is still relegated a marginal place.

My own interest in new music theatre stems from earlier research into the link between performance skills and music, and the role of the body as initiator of sound and movement. This was influenced in turn by the development of a physical-based theatre in Australia during the 80's which investigated the origins of commedia and clown, for example, linking them to the social history of performance. Similar parallels can be drawn in the history of music performance. During 1982-5 I developed these ideas further, both as a performer/ composer and in practical lecture/ workshops at the NSW Conservatorium, by initiating new ways of working based on spontaneous collaboration between students of composition. The emphasis was on the performative, dissolving any division between composer and performer, so as to concentrate on the actual possibilities as they presented themselves.

Concern with the history of performance practice is also reflected in a number of other composers' works from the time - a kind of re-evaluation and alteration of original material in order to suggest other, more subtle meanings from the perspective of the present. My own concern has been with the sources of Opera (*Arias* 1987), dance forms (*Carlheinz' Tango* 1984) and cabaret (*Suite for Kabarett* 1982), to name a few.

As in the realm of experimental theatre, composers have considered other levels of exchange with an audience - a sense of the pleasure in performance, of recognising both the 'body' of a sound as well as its meaning on an interpretive or symbolic level, and of the actual physical presence of the performer. Some of the most significant work to have come out of the 80's is contained in the very wide spectrum of Music theatre - a definition of which is no longer possible within previous boundaries. This development is chiefly due to the interlinking that is possible between visual and literary arts and music, providing a vital, dynamic ground for change. It also raises the question of collaborative and multi-disciplinary work, and the notion of a collective product. Emphasis has shifted to a materiality, a corporeality as the starting point. This is a major challenge for composers because it means dealing with and acknowledging unknown qualities, as well as an opening out of the working process. It confronts issues such as the methods of communication possible between the practitioners, and 'ownership' of a piece which is the result of a number of peoples' input. A real situation of collaboration is very rare, given the current socio-political climate and the stress laid on individual artistic survival. It is still a very artificial situation within the 'norm' because of funding structures. From within a group, it can only occur when the people involved have similar aesthetic outlooks and trust each other with them, something dependent on personal politics and motivation.

A very valuable step over the past few years has been the opening up of processes of collaboration within music theatre, and the availability of some degree of funding to support this, ie. the 1986 National Playwrights' Conference, with *The Doll* (John Baylis, Tony Strachan, Richard Vella, and myself) and the much larger scale event of 1987, where seven works<sup>3</sup> were presented with the collaboration of performers, dramaturgs, directors and a production team. At about the same time I was involved in another process-generated work as a performer/composer, entitled *Stolen Time* (Performance Space, Sydney) where the emphasis was very much on investigating new forms of theatre. A basis has been established from which changes in form and approach can occur within these 'new systems of creation'. It's important to assimilate the influences of cross-disciplinary work and allow them to permeate one's own individual work as well - although I'm not advocating collaborative work as the only new direction. A fundamental change has occurred in the 80's which needs, demands, to be taken further. It would be impossible now to revert back to former practice without disregarding the shift that has taken place.

A strong characteristic of experimental music would seem to be the way in which composers have

generated new sound sources, or adapted their work to the means available given the limitations of resources in Australia. This has meant the innovation or invention of new instrumental/ electronic sources, together with the re-invention of uses of existing ones. In my own case this is reflected in the use of instruments outside the traditional classical arena, such as the accordion and from 1985, my work with mechanical musical sources and early forms of sound reproduction such as the phonograph. Through this re-examination of means, the sound itself has become the basis of composition, turning the listener inward to its 'physical' source. The composer has reversed or challenged the structural use of sound, and turned towards sound-generated structures thereby creating multiple relationships between the two. The compositional process is opened out, laid bare. Much development in the 80's has focussed on the means rather than the form in order to address this relation, generating new forms from within the sound - the material itself - rather than from an exterior source. This raises many questions, such as the structural strength and independence of a work, its expectations soundwise (where does the sound go?) and the response of an audience (who are probably unaware of the sound source and how the piece was made) hearing it for the first time. It also raises the question of why the composer chooses to use these means and techniques, whether she/he intends that they come to the fore in the hearing of the piece, or in the overall musical effect, or both.

Within the area of future development of experimental music, it's important to assess the value of invention and innovation of means (and their increasing refinement) together with the reasons for their usage and the place they have within a composition. A piece isn't necessarily deemed 'experimental' by virtue of being electronic or incorporating new instruments and technology. A standard instrumental group can also have experimental potential, depending on the thought behind the work and the use of the materials and medium.

During the past decade many issues have been raised regarding the social and historical role of women and men in music. At the Australian National Composers Conference in 1988, a forum was presented addressing the minority position of women composers and the cultural and administrative factors that play a part in this. These discussions, together with a look at the socio-historical documentation of women in music, were outlined in a recent edition of *Sounds Australian* magazine<sup>4</sup>. An earlier edition of *NMA* magazine<sup>5</sup> provided a chance for women composers to discuss their work and methods of approach within a very wide area of music. Both publications indicate the need for further discussion aligning itself with other developments in the visual and literary arts, the whole situation of new music in society, and the part played by women and men in determining this situation. Pauline Oliveros<sup>6</sup> proposed a study of the working methods of both women and men composers, while Elizabeth Grosz<sup>7</sup> opened up the inquiry into the effects of feminist thought on the creative arts.

It is even more important to address the work itself and how it relates to these questions - the notion of



an artistic 'product', the attitude of the composer to the work produced, their relation to the public, the link of their aesthetic to current ideology/ philosophy. All these factors are inevitably tied up with the question of how experimental development reflects changes within society, and vice versa.

Perhaps one problem stopping any real, significant change is the relative isolation of composers, and a certain reluctance to directly relate the substance of their work to the socio-political climate in which it exists. Positive discriminatory practice is still necessary in order to challenge the imbalance that prevails in the representation of women composers as compared to men. Festivals such as the 1982 Women and Arts, and New Moods Women's Festival of 1985 (Sydney and Melbourne respectively) served this purpose by offering a position of 'separateness', of questioning the aesthetic values handed down by patriarchal society. There is a possibility of taking these aesthetic differences to the level of a 'split' between the genders, stopping short any further discourse within society in general. It should be remembered that there are also enormous differences between each woman composer's work and attitudes.

This points again to the importance of the work's political, material position from within - a position that dismisses any 'transcendental' notion or aesthetic. I refer to Elizabeth Grosz's article in this respect<sup>8</sup>, where she writes of the necessity to relate a work to its context (as well as looking at the general situation of women composers - their lives, their status, etc.). In doing so one directly questions set 'standards', hierarchy, and 'transcendence'. But this applies to all composers interested in social and political change - to perhaps be more aware of the ethical, moral and political direction of their work and to be responsible for their position. Ultimately this allows one to talk about the work separately, as existing in itself - to examine the substance of it independently and hence define its position. It takes the onus away from the personal - the issue of beliefs, dogma, manifestos - which in turn get tied up with 'artistic ego'. The emphasis shifts, and discourse/ exchange becomes possible without personal attack, opening out into a much more relevant and broader area of communication.

#### Footnotes

1. **Concise Oxford Dictionary** OUP 1976
2. Derrida, J. **On Colleges and Philosophy** ICA Documents no.5, 1986
3. These included **Indifference** by David Chesworth, **The White Bird** by Vineta Lagzdina, **Volcano & Vision** by Rainer Linz/Paul Greene, **Once Upon a Time** by Richard Vella and **Arias for Phonograph & Singers** by Caroline Wilkins.
4. **Sounds Australian** Autumn 1989 Australian Music Centre
5. **NMA4** NMA Publications 1985
6. "The Contribution of Women Composers", **NMA4** op. cit p18
7. "Feminism and the critique of Representation" **Sounds Australian** op. cit
8. *ibid*

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